

THE FAMILY LIFE OF BIRDS.—See page 80.

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"WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN THIS AFTERNOON?" RAFF ASKED, GAILY, AS THEY DROVE ALONG.

MISS GILMOUR'S SECRET.

—307—

CHAPTER I.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

LADY SUSAN FERRERS had announced her intention of arriving at Westwood by the four o'clock train, and as the stable clock chimed four strokes Lady Sue's three nieces assembled in the drawing room to await her coming. The carriage had been sent to the station to meet her, but it had gone empty. Not that one or all of the three Misses Ferrers would not willingly have gone with it, but there was the difficulty of returning to be faced, and it was a problem of whose insolubility former experiences had convinced them.

Lady Susan invariably travelled with a large retinue, which even the roomy proportions of the barouche only just sufficed to accommodate. There were her companion, her maid, her black poodle, her cockatoo, and her canary, besides a

variety of trunks, dressing-bags, and similar impediments—which gave the carriage the appearance of a travelling caravan, and brought out all the small children in the village to gaze.

"I wonder what Aunt Sue's new companion will be like!" observed the youngest Miss Ferrers—a small, fluffy haired, remarkably pretty young woman who seemed fully aware of her own attractions.

"One thing you may be sure of—she will be pretty," returned Clementina, the eldest a tall, angular creature, who was busily employed knitting stockings. "All Aunt Sue's companions have one point in common—and that is beauty."

"So you must look to your laurels, Minna," said Ruth a trifle maliciously. Ruth had been to Newnham, and posed as an "advanced woman," in consequence of which she had cropped her hair short, and taken to wearing hideous garments of æsthetic cut and bilious colour.

Minna's lips curved scornfully. She was too secure in her position as acknowledged beauty to

fear a rival; nevertheless, as she went to the window, she glanced at a mirror, and smiled coquettishly at the reflection it gave back.

"Here they come!" she announced, "and I declare the carriage looks for all the world like a furniture van on Lady Day! It's really too bad of Aunt Sue to travel with such a ridiculous amount of luggage!"

"Aunt Sue is rich, and therefore free to indulge her fancies," observed Clem, drily. "If it were one of ourselves the matter would be quite different. I suppose we had better go and meet her."

They waited on the top of the steps at the hall door. Below them ran a broad gravel walk, beyond it a line of stone balustrade, from the middle of which half a dozen steps cut in the turf led to a flat velvet lawn, bounded on one side by a plantation of shrubs, and on the other by a curving avenue of beeches that ended at the Lodge gates. The house itself was a roomy, red brick mansion, with gable ends and twisted stacks of chimneys. It looked its best on this

early September afternoon, with the Virginia creeper just turning crimson on the walls, and the dahlias and sunflowers blossoming in the borders.

The carriage drew up in front of the steps, the footman opened the door, and Lady Sue descended—Lady Sue as spick and span as if she had just appeared from her dressing-room. Her small, upright figure was clothed as usual in black, brightened by considerable quantities of jet, her white hair waved in two puffs on either side the piquant old face, her dark eyes, bright and observant as a bird's, flashed comprehensively over her three nieces, on whom she bestowed a bird-like peck, which did duty for a kiss.

"Am I up to time, my dears—and have you got tea ready? I am just dying for a cup, and so is Miss Gilmour. By the way, let me introduce you. Miss Gilmour these are my three nieces—by marriage—Clementine the sensible, Ruth the clever, and Minna the frivolous."

Miss Gilmour bowed stiffly, and followed the others in. She was tall, her hair was dark, her carriage was graceful, but she wore a thick black veil over her face which effectually concealed her features.

"Ah," said Lady Sue, seating herself in the most comfortable chair the drawing-room contained, "this quiet is a welcome change from the rush and hurry of London life. I dare say I should grow tired of it in time, but for a little while it is delicious. By-the-way, where is Rafe?"

"Out shooting. He'll be in to dinner."

"Rafe Ferrers is my nephew, and the Squire of Westwood," observed Lady Sue, for the edification of Miss Gilmour. "He is the second cousin of these young ladies, who are kind enough to keep house for him."

She sipped delicately at the tea Clementine had given her before she spoke again, then she said,—

"Has anything been heard of Denis Marchant lately?"

The question seemed to cause some consternation. The three girls exchanged frightened glances, but their confusion was covered by an incident that diverted attention from it.

Minna had been in the act of handing Miss Gilmour her tea. The companion reached out her hand to take the cup, but her fingers shook, and cup and saucer fell with a little clatter on the carpet, shivering into a dozen fragments.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" exclaimed Minna, with perfunctory politeness, after waiting for Miss Gilmour to take the blame of the accident—which she certainly ought to have done. "I can't imagine how it happened."

"I'm afraid it was more than half due to my awkwardness," returned the companion in a very low voice, bending to pick up the broken bits. "And it was such pretty china too!"

"Yes, it was as old as the century, and can't be replaced," interposed Lady Sue, grimly. "What could you have been about, Minna?"

Minna pouted, but did not reply, though she thought it hard lines to have to bear the burden of other people's mistakes.

"There is no question of Rafe's marriage, I suppose?" asked Lady Sue, presently.

"None that I am aware of," Clem responded, without raising her eyes.

"That is rather aptly. Rafe is perilously near thirty, and it will never do for him to sink into old bachelorhood. I must look round my acquaintances and see if I can't find a wife for him."

"Don't you think he is capable of making the selection himself, Aunt Sue?" put in Ruth, with a tinge of sarcasm.

"Certainly, my dear, if he be allowed fair chances; but with three female relations around him you must admit he is rather heavily handicapped," replied Lady Sue, pointedly, and hugely delighted at being able to "take a rise" out of the ex-Newham girl.

Clementine, always ready to throw herself into the breach, rose hastily.

"Shall I come with you to take your bonnet off, Aunt Sue? Minna, show Miss Gilmour to her room, will you?"

Minna led the way across the hall—which was

rich with stained glass windows, and fine oak carving—up shallow polished stairs, to a panelled oak gallery which gave access to the bed-rooms. The door of one of these she threw open.

"You'll be glad of a chance of washing your face—one does get so dirty after a journey," she said good-naturedly. "Though," she added, "even 'blacks' from the engine wouldn't have much chance of penetrating through that baffling veil of yours."

Miss Gilmour threw off hat and veil together, and Minna started as she saw her face.

It was undoubtedly a beautiful one, and none the less so because there was a curious sort of incongruity about it.

Her complexion was delicately fair—the complexion usually accompanying golden hair; but Miss Gilmour's hair instead of being golden was black, thick and lustreless, with a heavy wave in it.

Under finely pencilled brows, the grey eyes looked forth with an expression in which sadness and defiance equally mingled, deepening sometimes into actual tragedy.

Indeed, the girl's face, form and manner were oddly suggestive of forces held in check, of a self control rigidly adhered to, and at the same time of a certain watchful alertness that seemed to hold itself ready for any emergency.

Her first action when she found herself alone was to spring forward and turn the key in the lock. It almost seemed as if the impulse were unconscious, for she stood for a moment staring at the door, while an odd smile hovered round her lips.

"It isn't easy to get rid of old habits," she murmured, "though there's no necessity for secrecy here."

She went to the window, and leaned her arms on the sill. The scene on which she looked was a typical English landscape, viewed under its most favourable aspect. Red and gold deepened into rich copper tints on the trees, tinging to duller browns in the distant cornfields, where the grain had only just been cut.

In the park the bracken spread its fronds in all the magnificence of their russet hues, and the deer moved about amongst it like dun-coloured shadows flecked with white.

The air was very still, the smoke from the lodge went straight up in a transparent blue column to the faint blue sky, swallows twittered under the eaves, dragon-flies darted through the air, and over all fell the chastened glory of the autumnal sunshine.

"How peaceful it is!" she murmured again. "Here, if anywhere, one ought to find rest. I wonder if Rafe is going to give me a fair chance at last!"

She moved her position, and her thoughts went back to the incident in the drawing-room.

She shivered a little.

"It was only a coincidence," she went on. "The name is not an uncommon one, and I am not even sure that I caught it aright. My nerves are still out of order, which means that I must keep a strict watch over myself. I wonder if either of those girls noticed anything!"

Her meditations were brought to an abrupt close by a sharp tap at the door, followed by a rattle of the handle. The voice of Lady Sue said,—

"We are not at an hotel, my dear; there is no need for you to fasten yourself in! I only came to say that I shall not require you until dinner-time, so if you like to have a walk in the grounds you are at liberty to do so."

In other words, Lady Sue wanted a gossip with her nieces, and wished to be free from the constraint of her companion's presence; but this made no difference to the delight with which Miss Gilmour made use of her freedom.

In a few minutes she was out of doors drawing in deep breaths of the sweet country air. She had left her veil behind her, her face was flushed, her eyes sparkled.

At the end of the park, where it merged into a plantation of oak and beech, she stood still to watch a couple of deer fighting, with lowered horns and deep hoarse grunts; at the same moment a hare ran swiftly across the path in front of her—swerved, jumped high in the air,

with a half human shriek of pain, and then fell on its side, dead.

Simultaneously there came the report of a gun and, looking round, she saw approaching her a man in tweed knickerbockers and leathern gaiters.

"I must apologise," he said, courteously, but with some slight surprise, "I am afraid I have startled you. From where I stood the trunk of a tree prevented my seeing you, otherwise I should not have fired."

There was neither fright nor shyness in the straight, outlooking glance she turned upon him. A smouldering fire of scorn burnt in her beautiful eyes.

"I was not startled, but I am indignant at the idea of life so ruthlessly sacrificed," she returned quickly. "Why should you, or any other man, arrogate to yourself the right to deprive these free-born creatures of the wood of their heritage of existence?"

Perhaps if the questioner had been less beautiful Rafe Ferrers might not have thought it worth his while to answer; as it was he deliberated for a moment, and in the interval contrived to take a good long look at her as she stood under the orange-plashed splendour of a chestnut—tall and straight and defiant, her head thrown proudly back, her eyes coldly accusing, a faint crimson staining her cheeks.

"There are several ways in which I could defend myself if necessary," he said at last with a half smile. "In the first place I never take life wantonly, and then again, if rabbits and hares were allowed to increase at their natural rate we should be literally overrun with them in no time."

"That is begging the question. I should not mind if these creatures had a fair chance, but they are just shot down for your amusement—whether wantonly or not."

"On the contrary, their natural advantages of speed or flight must be reckoned in their chances, as set against the mark-man's skill—so much you will surely grant?"

She made a gesture of negation, and turned away—thereby piquing him into heightened interest. All this time he had been wondering who she could be. Quite suddenly a solution of the enigma flashed across him, and he came up level with her.

"Pardon me, but as you seem to be going to Westwood, perhaps you will allow me the pleasure of accompanying you. Let me introduce myself—I am Rafe Ferrers."

She bowed slightly, with an air of indifference, and with no attempt to emulate his candour. But Rafe Ferrers was not the man to be easily repulsed—as she found out later on!

"I have the pleasure of addressing Miss—Miss—?" he said, tentatively.

"Miss Gilmour. I am Lady Susan Ferrer's companion."

"Ah, I imagined so. This is your first visit to Westwood, then?"

"I have only been with Lady Susan a week," she replied, briefly. In effect she was angry with him for breaking the spell which the soft air, the sunshine, and the perfect beauty of the landscape had woven round her. She was annoyed with herself too, inasmuch as she had been betrayed into conduct which was clearly unbecoming her subordinate position. Who was she, Ursula Gilmour, that she should presume to find fault with the Squire of Westwood?

Her cheeks tingled with an irritated sense of shame. She tried her best not to look at him, and yet, by the time they reached the house, she had a tolerably correct idea of what he was like. A tall, deep chested man of eight and twenty, lithe and well knit, with a face strong rather than handsome, hair that had a tendency to curl, and dark brown eyes, singularly keen and penetrating. As they entered the hall Clementine met them—and she looked by no means pleased.

"Why, Rafe, how is it you and Miss Gilmour know each other! Surely you have not met before!"

"Unfortunately no. If we had I might not have developed into such an ardent and brutal sportsman." The Squire's eyes twinkled as he threw down his game. "Having arrived at my

present years of discretion I'm afraid there is small hope of my reformation."

"What in the world do you mean?" his cousin demanded, in bewilderment.

"I mean that I want some tea. Have it brought to me here, there's a good soul, and then I need not change my boots till I go upstairs to dress for dinner."

Miss Gilmour, glancing down from the landing saw he had thrown himself smiling into one of the low basket chairs, while Clementine pushed a wicker table to his side. Evidently the Squire of Westwood was very much lord and master in his own house, and evidently he was much amused at the temerity of the girl who had ventured to remonstrate with him half an hour ago.

Ursula Gilmour's brows contracted. Her own spirit was too masterful to relish the idea of being laughed at, and she had more than a suspicion that Rafe Ferrers was enjoying a joke at her expense.

CHAPTER II.

SISTER MONICA.

"AUNT SUE, where did you pick up Miss Gilmour?" abruptly demanded Clementina, some days later, when she and Lady Susan chanced to find themselves alone.

"It was the other way round, my dear—she picked me up," was the prompt response. "I'll tell you how it happened. I had been shopping in Bond-street, and jumped into a hansom, which, before we had gone a dozen yards, came into collision with another, the result being that I and my parcels were, roughly speaking, distributed all over the place. I was so shaken and astonished that I quite expected to find myself swept up in little pieces, and shot into a dust cart. Imagine my gratitude when Miss Gilmour came to the rescue! While she collected my parcels I collected my wits, and finally she put me in a four-wheeler, and we both drove home together. I took a great fancy to her, and finding she was looking out for a situation I then and there engaged her as my companion."

"But you don't mean to say you took her like that—without references, or anything?" Clem dropped her knitting as she put the question, and raised her hands and eyebrows in horror.

"Of course not," retorted Lady Sue, testily. "I am not in the habit of playing such fool's tricks. Miss Gilmour gave as a reference Lady Du Vernet, who is a friend of hers, and from whom I received a most satisfactory letter."

"Oh!" said Clementina, slightly disappointed; after a moment she added, "but what about Miss Gilmour's relations?"

"She has none."

"None?"

"A second cousin or two, perhaps; but that counts for very little," spitefully answered Lady Sue, hitting Clem in her most vulnerable part—for she and her sisters could only claim that degree of relationship with the Squire. "She has no father or mother, and she was educated at a convent in Lilla. When I met her she was staying with a lady named Mackeson in Brunswick-square; does that information satisfy you, or shall I call Miss Gilmour to answer any further questions you may desire to put?" concluded her little ladyship with some asperity, which was, however, borne by her niece with exemplary meekness.

To say the truth, Clementina had taken a dislike to the young companion; she had never quite got over the shock of seeing her enter the hall in company with Rafe Ferrers, and, perhaps, in consequence of this she kept a very sharp watch on Miss Gilmour. Its results were mostly of a negative nature.

Ursula neither wrote nor received letters, she never alluded to her past life, and if questions were put to her regarding it she managed to evade them. Moreover, although she had often been invited to join the family circle in the drawing-room, she invariably declined. Apparently she had no desire to make friends—indeed, her manner was occasionally brusque, and always reserved, and even Minna, who had made one or

two tentative efforts at friendship, found herself repulsed. Such hours of liberty as Lady Susan gave her she spent in long solitary rambles, and at the end of a week she found herself pretty well acquainted with the surrounding neighbourhood.

On the day following the conversation between Lady Sue and her niece there was to be a dinner party at Westwood, and Miss Gilmour had undertaken to gather some wreaths of briony to decorate the table. In her search for it she wandered rather farther than she had intended, and just as she was on the point of turning back a sharp shower of rain came on, threatening very speedily to drench her to the skin.

Her first impulse was to look round for shelter. She was standing on high ground given over to gorse and heather. To her left was a high grey wall, behind which tall chimneys gave indication of a large house, but the big iron gates were locked, and there was no tree near which could shield her. Some little distance away, however, she caught sight of a tiny thatched cottage, and to this she ran, and knocked smartly on the door.

Her summons was answered immediately by a woman, who silently motioned her to enter, and she found herself in a small room with white-washed walls, and stone floor. It was scrupulously clean, but the furniture was of the most meagre description—a deal table, a couple of chairs, and a silver and ebony crucifix hanging on the walls. This was absolutely all it contained.

As for the owner of the cottage, her appearance was startling in the extreme. She was rather above the middle height, slender, gracefully formed, and dressed in a garb resembling that of a Sister of Mercy. From under the white linen band she wore across her forehead a piece of black gauze reached down to the chin, completely concealing all the features except the eyes. These, seen through two slits in the gauze, were very dark and full, and seemed actually to burn with the intensity of some restless and consuming inward fire, of which they were the sole expression.

Ursula, meeting their gaze, lowered her own quickly, almost nervously.

"Have you come far?" asked the woman, in a curiously low inflectionless voice.

"From Westwood."

"Then you must be tired. I will get you some tea."

The young girl attempted some slight demur, but her hostess did not even seem to hear it. She put the kettle on the fire, reached out a cup and saucer, and after preparing the frugal meal motioned her visitor to the table.

"Won't you share my tea with me?" timidly asked Ursula, who had watched her in fascinated silence—held spell-bound by her weird personality.

She shook her head.

"I have not broken bread with anyone for nearly twenty years, and I am under a vow not to do so."

"You live alone, then?"

"Quite alone. If one of my fellow-creatures in sickness or sorrow wants me I am ready to tend him, but when his necessity is over I return to my solitude."

There was silence, but all the while Ursula was uncomfortably conscious of those magnetic eyes fixed upon her.

Outside the rain dashed heavily against the window, the wind rattled the casement, and moaned round the chimneys.

It seemed to Ursula as if some spell of pain and unrest had been laid upon her. With an effort she forced herself to speak.

"Who lives in that grey turreted building over there?" indicating it with a motion of her hand.

"The Moat House, you mean? It's owner is Paul Verinder."

"Is he young or old?"

"He is a man whom sorrow has made old."

There was a certain finality in her tone which forbade Ursula to pursue the subject. Once more silence reigned; it was broken by the young girl jumping up and going to the window.

Rain was still falling, but she decided she

would fifty times rather risk a drenching than sit here and endure the strain of this strange woman's burning gaze.

"It is growing late, and I have a good way to go. I must hurry, or I shan't get home before dusk," she said, somewhat incoherently.

The mistress of the cottage attempted no demur, but held the door open, and made a slight inclination of the head in response to her guest's thanks.

"I have done nothing for which you need be grateful—yet," she said, in her level tone, that hardly rose above a whisper, "perhaps in the future it may be otherwise. When you are in trouble you will seek me, and I shall be here."

It is possible that Ursula's nerves were overstrung; anyhow, there seemed to her something prophetic both in the voice and the words, and it half frightened her.

She did not breathe freely until she had left the common wall behind her, and stood in the high road, panting and breathless from running, but out of sight of the cottage.

The rain was now coming down in a perfect deluge; it would have been folly to remain out in it, and the young girl once more sought shelter—this time under the spreading branches of an oak by the road-side.

A little later she heard the sound of approaching wheels, and a dog-cart, drawn by a big raking chesnut, came spanking along, followed by a couple of dogs. It was driven by a man in an ulster and tweed cap, who pulled up directly he saw her.

"Hullo, Miss Gilmour, is that you? How forlorn you look! Jump in, and I'll drive you home."

The masterful way in which he took her consent for granted—moving aside, and throwing back the rug—nettled the girl's pride. A mischievous spirit of opposition awoke within her.

"You are very kind, Mr. Ferrers, but I do not think I need trouble you. The rain will soon be over, and it is not far to walk."

He seemed surprised. In effect he was not at all accustomed to having his wishes disregarded, and his first impulse was to shrug his shoulders and drive on.

If the girl liked being uncomfortable—why, let her!

Suddenly their eyes met, and instantly his resolution changed. In her glance he read the same defiance with which she had treated him in the park a week ago. It put him on his mettle; the masterful instinct was roused, and only those who knew Rafe Ferrers well could tell how much this meant!

He threw his cigar away, and bent down.

"I believe you are afraid of this tall mare! Otherwise you could not possibly choose to remain in so uncomfortable a position for an indefinite time, when a quarter-of-an-hour's driving would see you safely indoors. I assure you I am able to manage Peggy."

"I do not doubt it."

"Then why not trust yourself with her?"

"Because I prefer the walk."

"In the rain?"

"No, when the weather clears."

His keen eyes swept the sky.

"The weather is not going to clear; on the contrary, it is settling into a thoroughly wet evening. If you remain true to your intention you will have the pleasure of hearing the midnight chimes."

"It is impossible for you, or anyone else, to speak with certainty about the weather," she rejoined, obstinately.

"As impossible as to fathom the intricacies of a woman's will! Perhaps you are right. I won't contradict you. Time shall judge between us."

He let the reins hang loose, and leaned back in his seat quietly watching her.

The red blood quickened in her cheek. She bit her lip hard, and looked round helplessly, almost, as if seeking some means of escape. The road, muddy and strewn with soaked leaves, stretched long and solitary to where the grey mist blotted it out; the moisture dripped from the trees, the rain pattered heavily on the half bare boughs.

Ursula confessed to her own heart that his prophesy seemed likely to prove a true one.

"Ah! if he would but go away!"

"Mr. Ferrers!"

"Miss Gilmour!" His attitude was one of polite attention.

"What are you waiting for?"

"For you."

"But I have told you I would rather walk home."

"I am waiting for you to change your mind."

She turned away impatiently and fixed her eyes on the misty horizon.

She had a horrible feeling that in the end she would give way; that her will would yield to his.

Meanwhile the rain slanted steadily down and Ferrers sat perfectly still on his high seat.

Presently he changed his position and turned up his collar; a trickle of wet was dripping off the tree down his neck, and at the same moment Ursula noticed the steam rising from the panting flanks of the mare.

"Peggy will catch cold if you stay here any longer," she said.

"Likely enough. I wonder, taking into consideration your love for dumb animals, that aspect of the question did not strike you before."

A pang of remorse shot through Ursula's heart. Yes, he was right. She was sacrificing poor Peggy to her own wilful selfishness.

Without another word she came to the side of the cart and sprang in, unmindful of the hand he extended to help her. If she had seen the triumph in Rafe's eyes she might have promptly sprang out again. As it was she permitted him to tuck the rug round her, and did not even demur when he detached the cape from his ulster and drew it over her shoulders. Having given way in one important particular there was no reason why she should contend against trifles. Besides, she was feeling a little tired and overwrought; and after all—only she would not confess it—the sense of his protecting care and strength was not without a charm of its own.

"Where have you been this afternoon?" he asked, gaily, while the mare's long strides were taking them swiftly onward.

She told him, and asked if he knew anything about the strange woman at the cottage.

"Very little, beyond the fact of her being called 'Sister Monica,' and always wearing the black veil you describe. She has lived in the cottage for many years, and spent her time in nursing all the sick people of the neighbourhood. She must have a little money, for she never accepts pay for her services; and, if there is a case of contagious disease, she will have the patient in her own house, so as to prevent the spreading of the infection. My own opinion is that she is more than a little mad."

"Because she is unselfish!"

Rafe's brows contracted. He wished the girl were not quite so ready with her caustic speeches.

"Not for that so much as her strange ways generally. By-the-by, Miss Gilmour, why did you ask me that question?"

"Because I have found men unwilling to believe in woman's disinterested goodness."

"I think I may retort that you seem unwilling to give men credit for generosity."

"Oh, they are generous—when they have anything to gain by it," she answered, with a curl of her beautiful lip.

He looked at her curiously. Such bitterness sat very strangely on so young a girl, and at first he had been inclined to think she merely made herself the mouthpiece of the cheap cynicisms of the age. But on second thoughts he changed his opinion. There was a desperate earnestness in her face, and it matched the ring of her voice.

Whatever else she might be, she was at least sincere.

"You almost pique me into taking up the cudgels on behalf of my sex," he said. "I wonder, if I tried, whether I could convince you that your estimate of us is too severe!"

She shook her head, without replying. By this time the dog-cart had drawn up in front of

the steps, and Sands, the butler, stood at the door to receive his master.

Rafe helped Miss Gilmour out, and followed her to the hall, where Lady Sue was toasting her toes in front of the fire, a cup of tea at her elbow, and a novel on her lap.

"I have been waiting for you," she said to Ursula, vivaciously. "I have an important communication for you."

Rafe was behind the young girl, but his position allowed him a very good view of her profile, and it struck him that an anxiety, almost bordering on alarm, quickened in her expression.

"Does it concern myself?" she asked, in a low tense voice, and Lady Sue nodded assent.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

"You needn't look so frightened," added Lady Susan, laughing; "it's only that one of our expected guests has failed us for this evening, and we want you to take her place. Nothing so very alarming you see."

Ursula drew a swift breath of relief, then her brows contracted slightly. Evidently the invitation did not please her, but she made no sort of demur as she went upstairs to her room. Lady Sue looked at her nephew rather whimsically.

"How is it you and Miss Gilmour came in together, Rafe?"

"The merest accident, Aunt Sue."

"Ah, yes, of course—I did not suppose otherwise. By the way, do you ever play with edged tools?"

"Occasionally—but I am always careful that the edge is turned away from me."

The old lady smiled and shrugged her shoulder. Rafe had caught her meaning, and there was no more to be said.

An hour or two later the young Squire proceeded to the drawing-room to receive his guests, and found it already tenanted by Miss Gilmour. She was very plainly dressed in black, whose only relief was a little white lace round the corage, but Rafe confessed to himself that beauty like hers needed no adornment. Her low cut bodice showed the lovely curves of the milk-white neck and throat to the fullest advantage, her thick black hair twisted in a heavy coil round her head became her better than the diadem of an empress.

"You are down early," he said, smiling, as he joined her.

"My toilet is not elaborate. Perhaps that is the reason why," she answered.

He looked at her critically through half-closed lids, then he said,—

"My cousins tell me I am something of an artist as regards ladies' dresses, and I am anxious to keep up my reputation. My impression is that your toilette would be perfect if it had some flowers—let me get you some."

Without waiting for her reply he went to the conservatory at the end of the room. When he returned he held in his hand half-a-dozen deep hearted red roses, which he offered to her rather uncertain, to tell the truth, how she would receive his gift. To his surprise she took the flowers with a little exclamation of delight, and laid the velvet petals softly against her cheek.

"I love flowers," she murmured—"roses most of all. Sometimes I think I love them too much to take any pleasure in wearing them."

"You mean you don't like to see them fade? I understand perfectly; but you must make an exception in favour of these, because, whether you wear them or not, they will wither now they are out."

"That is true," she said, and she fastened the blossoms in her bodice, looking up at him with a charming smile as she finished. Clementina entering the room at this moment was just in time to catch the smile.

"Ruth and Minna not down yet?" she exclaimed irritably. "I wonder what they are doing?"

The wonder was set at rest by the entrance of the two young ladies, dressed alike in pale blue. But though the costumes themselves were

similar, they were worn with a considerable difference. Minna's soft infantile beauty looked more seductive than ever in the delicate lustre of the sheeny silk, with its white foam of lace trimming, and the crimson splashed bramble spray she had twisted in the curls of her golden hair. Ruth, on the contrary, had every appearance of having dressed with her eyes shut.

"What a terrible thing it is to have a clever sister!" exclaimed the younger girl, with a sigh that lost itself in a merry laugh. "Just think, if it hadn't been for me, Ruth would have forgotten all about the party, and come down in her bilious old velvet, and with hair suggestive of having been dragged through a hedge backwards!"

"I suppose it's frivolous to do your hair," put in Lady Sue, who had just entered, resplendent in brocade and diamonds, and with her own white locks most carefully arranged. "Ruth thinks we all ought to be clipped by machinery, like horses and convicts—it would save so much valuable time, wouldn't it, Ruth?"

"Perhaps so, Aunt Sue. But you must always bear in mind that there are a certain number of women whose time is of no value to themselves or anyone else," retorted Ruth, quite ready to defend her own opinions.

Lady Sue had no time to pursue the subject; for the visitors began to arrive, and they all presently went in to dinner. Ruth, to her intense disgust, was taken in by the curate, Miss Gilmour fell to the lot of a raw youth who had come with Lord Redvers, while Clementina selected for herself Captain Lequeane—a good-looking young officer, who was also staying with Lord Redvers.

Perhaps it was not surprising that this gentleman's attention should wander from his somewhat grim-visaged companion to pretty Minna, and then further down the table to where Miss Gilmour sat, listening with downcast eyes to her escort's enthusiastic description of the "bag" he had made that day. Captain Lequeane put up his eyeglasses, and regarded her very attentively; then he turned to Miss Ferrers.

"May I take my privilege as a stranger, and ask who the lady in black with the red rose is?"

Clementina made a pretence of looking round—though she knew perfectly well to whom he was alluding.

"Oh, that is my Aunt Lady Susan Ferrer's companion."

"Indeed. And her name is——?"

"Miss Gilmour."

He repeated it twice under his breath. His tone and manner challenged Clementina's curiosity.

"Have you ever seen her before, Captain Lequeane?"

He seemed taken aback by the abruptness of the question. It was a minute before he answered.

"I am not quite sure. Her face seems familiar to me, and yet there is a difference. No," he added, in another tone, "I don't think she can possibly be the lady she reminded me of."

"Miss Gilmour's face is not of a common type," persisted Clem.

"By no means. One could wish, on æsthetic grounds, that it were," he rejoined, politely.

Clem, however, was not convinced; she was pretty shrewd, and she doubted whether the soldier had been quite open with her. She noticed that he took every opportunity of looking at Ursula when he imagined himself unobserved, and once she surprised a puzzled expression on his face.

Unconscious of the scrutiny to which she had been subjected Miss Gilmour followed the other ladies to the drawing-room when dinner was over, and seated herself in a lonely corner, where she was presently joined by Minna, who was anxious she should not feel herself "out in the cold."

"I hope you were not ineffably bored at dinner, Miss Gilmour. Your sporting youth did not look very interesting."

"Indeed you are mistaken," replied Ursula, with a slight, dry smile. "He was so immensely interested in himself that he finally succeeded in

interesting me by sheer force of will. So far as he was concerned, the great 'I' bounded the universe."

"Well, he's very young, you see. He'll learn better as he gets older."

"Or worse."

Minna looked at her earnestly, then she said,—"Do you know, Miss Gilmour, I am glad I have not such a bad opinion of people as you have!"

"You are right to be glad," Ursula responded, in a low voice. "The best thing in life is a belief in your fellow-creatures."

"And yet you have lost that belief!"

"To my sorrow—yes. But I hope you may keep it."

There was something in the desperate sadness of the voice that went straight to Minna's heart, and, acting under a sudden impulse, she put out her hand, and clasped Ursula's. At this juncture, the gentlemen came in from the dining-room.

"I'll save you from your sporting youth," she whispered, gaily, "by getting up a flirtation with him on my own account."

She went off, bent on keeping her word, and Lementina advanced, followed by the officer.

"Miss Gilmour, Captain Lequesne wishes to be introduced to you—he thinks he has met you before," said Clem, firing off her words like the bullet from a gun, and watching keenly to observe their effect.

Ursula looked up, bowed slightly, and then lowered her eyes.

"I think Captain Lequesne must be mistaken," she rejoined, quietly; nevertheless Clem was conscious of some subtle change in her manner. She seemed to be "on guard."

"One is often baffled by unexpected likenesses," observed the officer, with the polished ease of a man well used to skating over thin ice, and he seated himself in front of the young girl in such a position as to lose no alteration of expression in her face. "You certainly do remind me very strongly of a lady I once met."

"Such resemblances owe a great deal to the imagination," Ursula answered. "It is pretty certain that if you could confront me at this moment with the lady you speak of, you would find many points of dissimilarity."

"No doubt—indeed I can think of an important one already. Her hair is light while yours is dark. Otherwise you are singularly alike."

To Clem's intense annoyance Lady Susan now came up to ask Miss Gilmour to sing. Ursula went to the piano with alacrity, evidently glad to escape from her companions.

"I wish to goodness I could get Lequesne to tell me whom she reminds him of," Miss Ferrers said to herself; but this was more than she was able to effect. Captain Lequesne was much too skilful a diplomatist to be "drawn" so easily under cover of the music.

Meanwhile Ruth was arguing warmly with the curate, Minna was deep in her flirtation, while Rafe, who was supposed to be entertaining Lady Redvers, was in reality listening to Ursula's singing.

Her voice was a rich contralto, and she managed it with the ease of one who has had considerable training. Lady Redvers put up her gold and tortoise-shell lorgnette to look at her.

"What a very handsome girl! She is Lady Sue's companion, I understand. She ought to be on the stage. With such a voice, and so much beauty, she would make her fortune!"

Rafe winced. The speech did not please him, neither did it please him to see the readiness with which Captain Lequesne went forward to escort the young girl from the piano.

Ursula, when she began playing, had taken off her gloves, and they had fallen to the floor. The officer picked them up; but as he gave them to her, he was looking, not in her face, but at her bare hands.

Involuntarily her gaze followed his, and she grew deadly pale; her right hand dropped to her side, she took the gloves with her left.

The action was ungraceful and, as it seemed, uncalled for, as he was standing on her right at the time.

Rafe, who had witnessed the incident, saw a sudden glance of comprehension flash into Le-

quesne's eyes, and he looked straight at Miss Gilmour with a smile for which the young squire could have struck him—it was one of recognition.

(To be continued.)

A SISTER'S REVENGE.

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CHAPTER XXVII.—(continued.)

IN vain Lena exerted all her wondrous powers of fascination to win him more completely. How little he dreamed of the depths of love which controlled that passionate heart, every throb of which was for him—that to have won from him one token of affection she would have given all she held dear in this world.

"How does it happen, Duncan," she asked, one evening, "you have not asked me to sing to you since you have asked me to be your wife? Music used to be such a bond of sympathy between us."

There was both love and reproach in her voice. He heard neither. He had simply forgotten it.

"I have been thinking of other things, I presume. Allow me to make up for it at once, however, by asking you if you will sing for me now."

The tears came to her dark flashing eyes, but she forced them bravely back.

She had hoped he would have clasped her in his arms, whispering some sweet compliment, then say to her,—

"Darling, won't you sing to me now?"

She swept toward the piano with the air of a queen.

"I want you to sit where I can see you, Duncan," she demanded, prettily. "I like to watch your face when I sing you my favourite songs."

Duncan drew his chair up close to the piano, laying his head back dreamily against the crimson cushions.

He would not be obliged to talk; for once—just once—he would let his fancies roam where they would.

He had often heard Lena sing before, but never in the way she sung to-night—in a low, thrilling, seductive voice full of pleading, passionate tenderness—a voice that whispered of the sweet, irresistible power of love, that carried away the hearts of her listeners as a strong current carries away a leaflet.

Was it a dream, or was it the night wind breathing the name of Madge! The tears rose in his eyes, and he started to his feet, pale and trembling with agitation.

Suddenly the music ceased.

"I did not think such a simple little melody had power to move you," she said.

"Is it a new song?" he asked. "I do not remember having heard it before. What is the title of it?"

He did not notice her face had grown slightly pale under the soft pearly light of the gleaming lamps as she held the music out towards him.

"It is a pretty title," she said, in her low, musical voice, "'My Darling's Grave.'"

In the terrible look of agony that swept over his handsome face Lena read the secret of his life; the one secret she had dreaded stood as clearly revealed to her as though it had been stamped in glowing letters upon his brow. She would have stood little chance of being Duncan's wife if Madge Meadows had lived.

Who would have dreamed the beautiful, proud young heiress could have cursed the very memory of the young girl whom she believed to be dead—lying all uncared for in a neglected, lonely grave?

Duncan felt sorely disturbed. He never remembered how the remainder of the evening passed. Ah, heavens! how his mind wandered back to that sweet love-dream so cruelly broken.

A mist of tears spread over his eyes, and shut the whole world from him as he glanced out of the window and up at the star-gemmed sky that was his Madge's home.

"I hope my little song has not cast a gloom over you, Duncan," she said, holding out her hands to him as she rose to bid him good-night—those small white hands upon one of which his

engagement-ring glowed with a thousand prismatic hues.

"Why should it?" he asked, attempting to laugh lightly. "I admired it perhaps more than any other I have ever heard you sing."

Lena well knew why.

"It was suggested to me by a strange occurrence. Shall I relate it to you, Duncan?"

He made some indistinct answer, little dreaming of how wofully the little anecdote would affect him.

"I do not like to bring up old, unpleasant subjects, Duncan; but do you remember what the only quarrel we ever had was about, or rather, who it was about?"

He looked at her in surprise; he had not the least idea of what she alluded to.

"Do you remember what a romantic interest you once took in that farmer's niece—the girl who eloped with Vincent Dalrymple from boarding-school—the one whose death we afterwards read of? Her name was Madge—Madge Meadows."

If she had suddenly plunged a dagger into his heart he could not have been more cruelly startled. He could have cried aloud with the sharp pain of unutterable anguish that memory brought him. His answer was a bow. He dared not look up lest the haggard pain of his face should betray him.

"Her uncle—he was no relation, I believe, but she called him that—was more fond of her than words can express. I was driving along by an unfrequented road, to day, when I came across a strange, pathetic sight. The poor old man was putting the last touches to a plain wooden cross he had just erected under a tree, which bore the words, 'To the memory of Madge Meadows, aged sixteen years.' Around the cross the grass was thickly sown with daisies."

"She does not rest here," the old man said; drawing his rough sleeve across his tear-dimmed eyes; "but the poor little girl loved this spot best of any."

Lena wondered why Duncan took her just then in his arms for the first time and kissed her. He was thanking her in his heart; he could have knelt to her for the kind way she had spoken of Madge.

A little later he was standing by the open window of his own room in the moonlight.

"Great Heavens!" he cried, burying his face in his hands, "this poor George Meadows did what I, her husband, should have done. But it is not too late now. I shall honour your memory, my darling. I shall have a costly marble monument erected to your memory, bearing the inscription: 'Sacred to the memory of Madge, beloved wife of Duncan Field, aged sixteen years.' Not Madge Meadows, but Madge Field. Mother is dead, what can secrecy avail now!"

He would not tell Lena until the last moment. Straightway he ordered a magnificent monument from London—one of pure, unblemished marble, with an angel with drooping wings overlooking the tall white shaft.

When it arrived he meant to take Lena there, and, reverently kneeling down before her, tell her the story of his sweet, sad love-dream with his face pressed close against the cold pulseless marble—tell her of the love-dream which had left him but the ashes of dead hope. He sealed the letter and placed it with the outgoing morning post.

"Darling, how I wish I had not parted from you that night!" he sighed.

How bitterly he regretted he could not live that one brief hour of his past life over again—how differently he would have acted!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHILE Duncan was penning the all-important letter in his room Lena was walking restlessly to and fro in her boudoir, cuning over in her mind the events of the evening.

Duncan had asked her to be his wife. But she stood face to face with the truth at last—he did not love her. It was not only a blow of the keenest and cruellest kind to her affection, but

it was the cruellest blow her vanity could possibly have received.

To think that she, the wealthy, petted heiress who counted her admirers by the score, should have tried so hard to win the love of this man, and fail; that her beauty, her grace, her wit, and her talent, had been lavished upon him, and lavished in vain!

"Was that simple girl, with her shy, timid, shrinking manner, more lovable than I?" she asked herself.

She could not realize it—she, whose name was on the lips of men who praised her as the queen of beauty, and whom fair women envied as one who had but to will to win.

It seemed to her a cruel mockery of fate that she, who had everything the world could give—beauty and fortune—should ask but this one gift and that it should be refused her—the love of the man who had asked her to be his wife.

Was it impossible that he would learn to love her?

She told herself that she should take courage; that she would persevere; that her great love must in time prevail.

"I must never let him find me dull or unhappy," she thought. "I must carefully hide all traces of pique or annoyance."

She would do her best to entertain him, and make it the study of her life to win his love.

She watched the stars until they faded from the skies, then buried her face in her pillow, and fell into an uneasy slumber, through which a beautiful girlish face floated, and a slight, delicate form knelt at her feet, holding her arms out imploringly, sobbing out:

"Do not take him from me—he is my world—I love him!"

And with a heart racked by jealousy Lena turned uneasily on her pillow and opened her eyes.

"Is the face of Madge Meadows ever to haunt me thus?" she cried out impatiently. "How was I to know she was to die?" she muttered, excitedly. "I simply meant to have Vincent Dalrymple abduct her from the seminary, that Duncan might believe him her lover and turn to me for sympathy. I will not think of it," she cried; "I am not the one to flinch from a course of action I have marked out for myself no matter what the consequences may be, if I only gain Duncan's love."

And Lena, the bride soon to be, turned her flushed face again to the wall to dream again of Madge Meadows.

She little dreamed that Duncan, too, was watching the stars, as wakeful as she, thinking of the past.

Then he prayed Heaven to help him, so that no unworthy thought should enter his mind. After that he slept, and the most painful day of his life was ended.

The days at Stanton Hall flew by rapidly in a round of gaiety. The Hall was crowded with young folks who were to remain until after the marriage. Dinner parties were followed by May-pole dances out on the green lawn, and by charades and balls in the evening. The old Hall had never before echoed with such frolicsome mirth. Duncan plunged into the excitement with strange zest. No one guessed that beneath his winning, careless smile his heart was almost breaking.

One morning Lena was standing alone on the vine-covered terrace, waiting for Duncan, who had gone out to try a beautiful spirited horse that had just been added to the stables.

She noticed he had taken the unfrequented road the oak trees shaded. That fact bore no significance, certainly; still there was a strong feeling of jealousy in her heart as she remembered that little wooden cross he would be obliged to pass. Would he stop there? She could not tell.

"How I love him—and how foolish I am!" she laughed nervously. "I have no rival, yet I am jealous of his very thoughts, lest they dwell on anyone else but myself. I do not see how it is," she said thoughtfully, to herself, "why people laugh at love, and think it weakness, or a girl's sentimental folly. Why, it is the strongest of human passions."

She heard people speak of her approaching

marriage as "a grand match;" she heard him spoken of as a wealthy Scotch laird, and she laughed a proud, happy, rippling laugh. She was marrying Duncan for love; she had given him the deepest, truest love of her heart.

Around a bend in the terrace she heard approaching footsteps and the rippling of girlish laughter.

"I can not have five minutes to myself to think," she said to herself, drawing hastily back behind the thick screen of leaves until they should pass. She did not feel in the humour just then to listen to Miss Stanhope's chatter or pretty Enid Berringer's gossip.

"Of course everyone has a right to her own opinion," Enid was saying with a toss of her pretty nut-brown curls, "and I, for one, do not believe he cares for her one whit."

"It is certainly very strange," responded Miss Stanhope, thoughtfully. "Everyone can see she is certainly in love with Duncan, but I am afraid it is a one-sided affair."

"Yes," said Enid, laughing shyly, "a very one-sided affair. Why, have you ever noticed them together—how Lena watches his face and seems to live in his smiles! And as for Duncan, he always seems to be looking over her head into distance, as though he saw something there far more interesting than the face of his bride to be. That doesn't look much like love or a contented lover."

"If you had seen him this morning you might well say he did not look contented," replied Miss Stanhope, mysteriously. "I was out for a morning ramble, and feeling a little tired, I sat down on a moss-covered stone to rest. Hearing the clatter of a horse's hoofs, I looked up, and saw Duncan Field coming leisurely down the road. I could not tell you what prompted me to do it, but I drew quietly back behind the overhanging alder branches that skirted the brook, admiring him all unseen."

"Oh, dear," cried Enid, merrily, "this is almost too good to keep. Who would imagine disguised Miss Stanhope peeping admiringly at handsome Duncan, screened by the shadows of the alders?"

"Now don't be ridiculous, Enid, or I shall be tempted not to tell you the most interesting part," returned Miss Stanhope, flushing hotly.

"Oh, that would be too cruel!" cried Enid, who delighted in anything bordering on mystery. "Do tell it."

"Well," continued Miss Stanhope, dropping her voice to a lower key, "when he was opposite me he suddenly stopped short and quickly dismounted from his horse, and picked up from the road-side a handful of daisies."

"What in the world could he want with them?" cried Enid, incredulously.

"Want with them?" echoed Miss Stanhope.

"Why, he pressed them to his lips, murmuring passionate, loving words over them. For one brief instant his face was turned towards me, and I saw there were tears standing in his eyes, and there was a look on his face I shall never forget to my dying day, there was such hopeless woe upon it—indeed, one might have almost supposed by the expression of his face he was waiting for his death-sentence to be pronounced, instead of a marriage ceremony which was to give him the queenly heiress of the Hall for a bride."

"Perhaps there is some hidden romance in the life of handsome Duncan the world does not know of!" suggested Enid, sagely.

"I hope not," responded Miss Stanhope. "I would hate to be a rival of Lena Stanton. I have often thought, as I watched her with Duncan, it must be terrible to worship one person so madly. I have often thought Lena's a perilous love."

"Do not speak so," cried Enid. "You horrify me. Whenever I see her face I am afraid those words will be ringing in my ears—a perilous love."

Miss Stanhope made some passing rejoinder which Lena, white and trembling behind the ivy vines, did not catch, and still discussing the affair, they moved on, leaving Lena Stanton, standing alone, face to face with the truth, which she had hoped against hope was false. Duncan, who

was so soon to be her husband, was certainly not her lover.

Her keen judgment had told her long ago all this had come about through his mother's influence.

Every word those careless lips had uttered came back to her heart with a cruel stab.

"Even my guests are noticing his coldness!" she cried with a little hysterical sob. "They are saying to each other, 'He does not love me'—I, who have counted my triumphs by the score. I have revealed my love in every word, tone, and glance, but I cannot awaken one sentiment in his proud, cold heart."

When she remembered the words, "He pressed them to his lips, murmuring passionate, loving words over them," she almost cried aloud in her fierce, angry passion. She knew, just as well as though she had witnessed him herself, that those meadow-sweet flowers had reminded him of Madge. She saw the sun shining on the trees, the flower-beds were great squares and circles of colour, the fountains sparkled in the sunlight, and restless butterflies flitted higher and thither.

For Lena Stanton, after that hour, the sunshine never had the same light, the flowers the same colour, her face the same smile, or her heart the same joyousness.

Never did "good and evil" fight for a human heart as they struggled in that hour in the heart of the beautiful, wilful heiress. All the fire, the passion, the recklessness of her nature were aroused.

"I will make him love me, or I will die!" she cried, vehemently. "The love I long for shall be mine. I swear it, cost what it may!"

She was almost terribly beautiful to behold, as that war of passion raged within her.

She saw a cloud of dust arising in the distance. She knew it was Duncan returning, but no bright flush rose to her cheek as she remembered what Miss Stanhope had said of the flowers he had so rapturously caressed. He had given a few rank wild flowers the depth of a passionate love which he had never shown to her whom he had asked to be his wife.

She watched him as he approached nearer and nearer, so handsome, so graceful, so winning, one of his white hands carelessly resting on the spirited animal's proudly arched neck, and with the other raising his hat from his brown curls in true cavalier fashion to her, as he saw her standing there, apparently awaiting him, on the rose-covered terrace.

He looked so handsome and lovable Lena might have forgotten her grievances, had she not at that moment espied, fastened to the lapel of his coat, a cluster of those daisies.

The sight of them took the light out of her dark passionate eyes and the welcome from her scarlet lips.

He leaped lightly from the saddle, and came quickly forward to meet her, and then drew back with a start.

"What is the matter, Lena!" he asked, in wonder.

"Nothing," she replied, keeping her eyes fastened, as if fascinated, on the offending flowers he wore on his breast.

"I left you an hour ago smiling and happy. I find you white and worn. There is a strange light in your eyes, like the aluminous fire of a volcano; even your voice seems to have lost its tenderness. What is it, Lena?"

She raised her dark, proud face to his. There was a strange story written on it, but he could not tell what it was.

"It—it is nothing. The day is warm, and I am tired, that is all."

"You are not like the same Lena who kissed me when I went away," he persisted. "Since I left this house something has come between you and me. What is it, Lena?"

She looked up to him with a proud gesture that was infinitely charming.

"Is anything likely to come between us?" she asked.

"No, not that I know of," he answered, growing more and more puzzled.

"Then why imagine it?" she asked.

"Because you are so changed, Lena," he said. "I shall, perhaps, never know the cause of you."

change of manner towards me, but I shall always feel sure it is something which concerns myself. You look at me as though you were questioning me," he said, "I wish you would tell me what is on your mind."

"I do not suppose it could make the least difference," she answered, passionately. "Yes, I will tell you what you must have been blind not to notice long ago. Have you not noticed how the guests watch us with a peculiar smile on their lips as we come among them, and how their voices sink to a whisper lest we should overhear what they say? What is commented upon by my guests and the people all about us? Listen, then, it is this: Duncan Field does not love the woman he has asked to be his wife. The most indifferent lover could not treat her more coolly. They say, too, that I have given you the truest and deepest love of my heart, and have received nothing in return. Tell me that it is all false, my darling. You do care for me, do you not, Duncan? Tell me," she implored.

"Good heavens!" cried Duncan, almost speechless in his consternation, "do they dare say such things! I never thought my conduct could give rise to one reproach, one unkind thought."

"Tell me, do you care for me, Duncan?" she cried. "I have been almost mad with doubt."

There was something in the lovely face, in the tender, pleading eyes and quivering scarlet mouth that looked as if it were made for kisses, that Duncan would have had to have been something more than mortal man to have resisted her pleading with sighs and tears for his love, and refuse it, especially as she had every reason to expect it, as he had asked her to be his wife. There was such a look of unutterable love on her face it fairly bewildered him. The passion in her voice startled him. What was he to do with this impetuous girl? Duncan looked as if he felt exceedingly uncomfortable.

He took her in his arms and kissed her; he knew that was what she wanted, and what she expected him to do.

"This must be my answer, dear," he said, holding her in a close embrace.

In that brief instant she had torn the flowers from the lapel of his coat with her white, jewelled fingers, tossed them to the earth, and stamped her dainty feet upon them, wishing in the depths of her soul that she could crush out from his heart all remembrance of the young girl for whose memory this handsome lover of hers wore these wild blossoms on his breast.

As Duncan looked down into her face he missed them, and quickly unclasped his arms from around her with a little cry.

Sneeping down, he instantly recovered his crushed treasures, and lifted them reverently in his hand with a sigh.

"I cannot say that I admire your taste, Duncan," she said, with a short, hard laugh that somehow grated harshly on her lover's ears. "The conservatories are blooming with rare and odorous flowers, yet you choose these obnoxious plants. They are no more or less than a species of weeds. Never wear them again, Duncan. I despise them; throw them away, and I will gather you a rare bouquet of white hyacinths, jessamine, and golden-rod bells."

The intense quiver in her voice pained him, and he saw her face wore the pallor of death, and her eyes were gleaming like restless fire.

"I will not wear them, certainly, if you dislike them, Lena," he said, gravely; "but I do not care to replace them by any other."

He did not fasten them in his coat again, but transferred them to his breast-pocket. She bit her scarlet lips in impotent rage.

In the very moment of her supreme triumph and happiness he had unclasped his arms from about her to pick up the flowers she had crushed with her tiny heel—those flowers which reminded him of that other love that still reigned in his heart a barrier between them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"I no think it is a perfect shame those horrid Bronson girls are to be invited here for Duncan's wedding!" cried little Mollie Field, hobbling

into the room where Mrs. Martin sat busily engaged in hemming some new table-linen, throwing herself down on a low hassock at her feet, and laying down her crutch beside her. "It is perfectly awful!"

"Why," said Mrs. Martin, smoothing the nut-brown curls back from the child's flushed face, "I should think you would be very pleased! They were your neighbours when you were up in the Highlands, were they not?"

"Yes," replied the little girl, frowning; "but I don't like them one bit! Blanche and Myra—that's the two eldest ones—make me think of those stiff figures in the trailing dresses in the magazines. Cousie is nice, but she's a tom-boy."

"A wh-ah!" cried Mrs. Martin.

"She's a tom-boy, mamma always said. She romps, and has no manners."

"They will be your neighbours when you go North again; so, I suppose, your brother thought of that when he invited them."

"He never dreamed of it!" cried Mollie, "it was Lena's doing."

"Hush, child; don't talk so loud," entreated the old housekeeper; "she might hear you."

"I don't care!" cried Mollie. "I don't like her, anyhow, and she knows it. When Duncan is here she is as sweet as honey to me, and calls me 'pretty little dear'; but when Duncan isn't here she scarcely notices me; and I hate her—yes, I do!"

Mollie clinched her little hands together, crying out the words in a shrill scream.

"Mollie," cried Mrs. Martin, "you must not say such hard, cruel things! I have heard you say over and over again you liked Mr. Stanton, and you must remember Lena is his daughter, and she is to be your brother's wife. You must learn to speak and think kindly of her."

"I never shall like her," cried Mollie, defiantly, "and I am sure Mr. Stanton doesn't!"

"Mollie!" ejaculated the good lady, in a fright, dropping her scissors and spoons in consternation; "let me warn you not to talk so again. If Miss Lena was to once hear you, you would have a sorry enough time of it all your after life. What put it into your head that Mr. Stanton did not like his own daughter?"

"Oh, lots of things," answered Mollie. "When I tell him how pretty everyone says she is he groans, and says strange things about fatal beauty which marred all his young life, and ever so many things I can't understand, and his face grows so hard and stern I am almost afraid of him."

"He is thinking of Lena's mother," thought Mrs. Martin—but she made no answer.

"He likes to talk to me," pursued the child, rolling the empty spoons to and fro with her crutch, "for he pities me because I am lame."

"Bless your dear heart," said Mrs. Martin, softly stroking the little girl's curls; "it is seldom poor old master takes to anyone as he has to you."

"Do I look anything like the little child that died?" questioned Mollie.

A low, gasping cry broke from Mrs. Martin's lips, and her face grew ashen white. She tried to speak, but the words died away from her throat.

"He talks to me a good deal about her," continued Mollie, "and he weeps such bitter tears, and has such strange dreams about her. Why only last night he dreamed a beautiful, golden-haired young girl came to him, and held out her arms, and cried softly:—

"Look at me, father; I am your child. I was never laid to rest beneath the violets, in my young mother's tomb. Father, I am in sore distress—come to me, father, or I shall die!"

"Of course it was only a dream, but it makes poor Mr. Stanton cry so; and what do you think he said?"

The child did not notice the terrible agony on the old housekeeper's face, or that no answer was vouchsafed her.

"My dreams haunt me night and day," he cried. "To still this wild, fierce throbbing of my heart I must have that grave opened, and gaze once more upon all that remains of my loved and

long-lost bride, sweet Brenda and her little child." He was—

Mollie never finished her sentence.

A terrible cry broke from the housekeeper's livid lips.

"Great Heaven!" she cried, hoarsely, "after nearly seventeen years my sin of silence is about to find me out at last!"

"What is the matter, Mrs. Martin? Are you ill?" cried the startled child.

A low, despairing sob answered her, as Mrs. Martin arose from her seat, took a step or two forward, then fell headlong to the floor in a deep and death-like swoon.

Almost any other child would have been terrified, and alarmed the household.

Mollie was not like other children. She saw a pitcher of ice-water on an adjacent table, which she immediately proceeded to sprinkle on the white, wrinkled face; but all her efforts failed to bring the fleeing breath back to the cold, pallid lips.

At last the child became fairly frightened.

"I must go and find Duncan or Mr. Stanton," she cried, grasping her crutch, and limping hurriedly out of the room.

The door leading to Miles Stanton's apartments stood open—the master of Stanton Hall sat in his easy chair, in morning-gown and slippers, deeply immersed in the columns of his account-books.

"Oh, Mr. Stanton," cried Mollie, her white, scared face peering in at the door, "won't you please come quick! Mrs. Martin, the housekeeper, has fainted ever so long ago, and I can't bring her to!"

Miles Stanton hurriedly arose and followed the now thoroughly frightened child to the room where the old housekeeper lay, her hands pressed close to her heart, the look of horror deepening on her face.

Quickly summoning the servants, they raised her from the floor. It was something more than a mere fainting fit. The poor old lady had fallen face downward on the floor, and upon the sharp point of the scissors she had been using, which had entered her body in close proximity to her heart. The wound was certainly a dangerous one. The surgeon, who was quickly summoned, shook his head dubiously.

"The wound is of the most serious nature," he said. "She cannot possibly recover."

"I regret this sad affair more than I can find words to express," said Miles Stanton, gravely. "Mrs. Martin's whole life almost has been spent at Stanton Hall. You tell me, doctor, there is no hope. I can scarcely realise it."

Every care and attention was shown her; but it was long hours before Mrs. Martin showed signs of returning consciousness, and with her first breath she begged that Miles Stanton might be sent for at once.

He could not understand why she shrank from him, refusing his proffered hand.

"Tell them all to leave the room," she whispered. "No one must know what I have to say to you."

Wondering a little what she had to say to him, he humoured her wishes, and sent them all from the room.

"Now, Mrs. Martin," he said, kindly, drawing his chair up close to the bedside, "what is it? You can speak out without reserve; we are all alone."

"Is it true that I cannot live?" she asked, eagerly scanning his face. "Tell me truthfully, master, is the wound a fatal one?"

"Yes," he said, sympathetically, "I—I am afraid it is."

He saw she was making a violent effort to control her emotions.

"Do not speak," he said, gently; "it distresses you. You need perfect rest and quiet."

"I shall never rest again until I make atonement for my sin!" she cried, feebly. "Oh, master, you have ever been good and kind to me, but I have sinned against you beyond all hope of pardon. When you hear what I have to say you will curse me. Oh, how can I tell it! Yet I cannot rest in my grave with this burden on my soul."

He certainly thought she was delicious, this

poor, patient, toll-worn soul, speaking so incoherently of sin; she, so tender hearted—she would not even have hurt a sparrow.

"I can promise you my full pardon, Mrs. Martin," he said, soothingly; "no matter on what ground the grievance may be."

For a moment she looked at him incredulously. "You do not know what you say. You do not understand," she muttered, fixing her fast-dimming eyes strangely upon him.

"Do not give yourself any uneasiness upon that score, Mrs. Martin," he said, gently; "try to think of something else. Is there anything you would like to have done for you?"

"Yes," she replied, in a voice so hoarse and changed he could scarcely recognise who had spoken. "When I tell you all, promise me you will not curse me; for I have sinned against you so bitterly that you will cry out to Heaven asking why I did not die long years ago, that the terrible secret I have kept so long might have been wrung from my lips."

"Surely her ravings are taking a strange turn," he thought to himself; "yet I will be patient with her and humour her strange fancy."

The quiet, gentle expression did not leave his face, and she took courage.

"Master," she said, clasping her hands nervously together, "would it pain you to speak of the sweet, golden-haired young girl-bride who died on that terrible stormy night nearly seventeen years ago?"

She saw his care-worn face grow white, and the lines of pain deepen around his mouth.

"That is the most painful of all subjects to me," he said, slowly. "You know how I have suffered since that terrible night," he said, shudderingly. "The double loss of my sweet young wife and her little babe has nearly driven me mad. I am a changed man; the weight of the cross I have had to bear has crushed me. I live on, but my heart is buried in the grave of my sweet, golden-haired Brenda and her little child. I repeat, it is a painful subject; still, I will listen to what you have to say. I believe I owe my life to your careful nursing when I was stricken with the brain fever that awful time."

"It would have been better if I had let you die then, rather than live to inflict the blow which my words will now give you. Oh, master," she implored, "I did not know then what I was doing was a sin. I feared to tell you lest the shock might cost you your life. As time wore on I grew so frightened I dared not undo the mischief my silence had wrought. Remember, master, when you looked upon me in your bitterest, fiercest moments of agony, what I did was for your sake, to save your bleeding heart one more pang. I have been a good and faithful woman all my life, faithful to your interests."

"You have indeed," he responded, greatly puzzled as to what she could mean.

She tried to raise herself on her elbow, but her strength failed her, and she sunk back exhausted on the pillow.

"Listen, Miles Stanton," she said, fixing her strangely bright eyes upon his noble, care-worn face, "this is the secret I have carried in this bosom for nearly seventeen years: Your golden-haired young wife died on that terrible stormy night you brought her to Stanton Hall; but listen, Miles, the child did not! It was stolen from our midst on the night the fair young mother died."

CHAPTER XXX.

"GREAT Heavens!" cried Miles Stanton, starting to his feet, pale as death, his eyes fairly burning, and the veins standing out on his forehead like cords, "you do not know what you say, woman! My little child—Brenda's child was mine—not dead, but stolen on the night its mother died! It cannot be! Surely you are mad!" he shrieked.

"It is true, master," she moaned—"true as Heaven."

"You knew my child, for whom I grieved for seventeen long years, was stolen—not dead—and dared to keep the knowledge from me?" he cried, passionately, beside himself with rage,

agony, and fear. "Tell me quickly, then, where I shall find my child!" he cried, breathlessly.

"I do not know, master," she moaned.

For a few moments Miles Stanton strode up and down the room like a man bereft of reason.

"You will not curse me," wailed the tremulous voice from the bed; "I have your promise."

"I cannot understand how Heaven could permit you to remain silent all these long, agonizing years if your story be true. Why, you told me my wife and child had died on that never-to-be-forgotten night, and were buried in one grave. How could you dare steep your lips with a lie so foul and black! Heaven should have struck you dead while the false words were on your lips!"

"I dared not tell you, master," moaned the feeble voice, "lest the shock would kill you; then, after you recovered, I grew afraid of the secret I had dared to keep, and not tell you."

"And yet you knew that somewhere in this cruel world my little child was living—my tender, little fair-haired child—while I, her father, was wearing my life out with the grief of that terrible double loss. Oh, woman, woman, may Heaven forgive you, for I never can, if your words be true."

"I feared such anger as this; that is why I dared not tell you," she whispered, faintly. "I appeal to your respect for me in the past to hear me, to your promise of forgiveness to shield me, to your love for the little child to listen calmly while I have strength to speak."

He saw she was right. His head seemed on fire, and his heart seemed bursting with the intensity of his great excitement.

He must listen while she had strength to tell him of his child.

"Go on—go on!" he cried, hoarsely, burying his face in the bed-clothes; "tell me of my child!"

"You remember the terrible storm, master, how the trees moaned against the western wing, where your beautiful young wife lay dead, with the pretty, smiling, blue-eyed babe upon her breast!"

"Yes, yes—go on—you are driving me mad!" he groaned.

"You remember how you fell down senseless by her bedside when we told you the terrible news—that your young girl-bride was dead?"

She knew by the quivering of his form that he heard her.

"As they carried you from the room, master, I thought I saw a woman's form gliding stealthily through the dark corridors. A blaze of lightning illumined the hall for an instant, and I can swear I saw a woman's face—a white, mocking, gloriously beautiful face—strangely like the face of your first wife, master—Lena's mother. I knew it could not be her, for she was lying beneath the waves. It was not a good omen, and I felt sorely afraid and greatly troubled. When I returned to the room to which they had carried you there lay your fair young wife with a smile on her lips, but the tiny babe that had slumbered on her breast was gone."

"Oh! if you had only told me this years ago," cried the unhappy father. "Have you any idea who could have taken the child? It could not have been for gain, or I should have heard of it long ago. I did not know I had an enemy in the wide world. You say you saw a woman's face!" he asked, thoughtfully.

"It was the ghost of your first wife," asserted the old housekeeper. "I never saw her face but once; but there was something about it one could not easily forget."

Miles Stanton was not a superstitious man, yet he felt a strange, unaccountable dread stealing over him at the bare mention of such a thing. It was more than he could endure to hear the name of the wife he had loved, coupled with the dark, sparkling face of the wife who had brought upon him such trouble in his youth.

"Have you not some clue to give me?" he cried out in agony—"some way by which I can trace her and learn her fate!"

She shook her head.

"This is unbearable!" he cried, pacing up and down the room like one who had received an un-

expected blow. "I am bewildered! Merciful Heaven! which way shall I turn? This accounts for my restlessness all these years, when I thought of my child—my restless longing and fanciful dreams! I thought my child was quietly sleeping on her mother's breast. Heaven only knows what my tender little darling has suffered, or in what part of the world she lives, or if she lives at all!"

It had been just one hour since Miles Stanton had entered that room, a placid-faced, grey-haired man. When he left it his hair was white as snow from the terrible ordeal through which he had just passed.

He scarcely dared hope that he should yet find her, or where or how he should find her.

In the corridor he passed groups of maidens, but he neither saw nor heard them. He was thinking of the child that had been stolen from him in her infancy—the sweet little babe with the large blue eyes and shining rings of golden hair.

He saw Lena and Duncan greeting some new arrivals out on the flower-bordered terrace, but he did not stop until he had reached his own apartments.

He did not send for Lena to divulge the wonderful discovery he had made. There was little sympathy or confidence between the father and daughter.

"I can never sleep again until I have some clue to my child!" he cried, frantically wringing his hands.

Hastily he touched the bell-ropes.

"Stone," he said to the servant who answered the summons, "pack my valise at once. I am going to take the first train to London. You have no time to lose."

He did not hear the man's ejaculation of surprise as his eyes fell on the face of the master who stood before him with hair as white as snow—so utterly changed in one short hour.

(To be continued.)

THE FAMILY LIFE OF BIRDS.

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"They have left their nests on the leafy bough
Their homes of delight they need not now,
And the young and the old they wander out,
And traverse the green world all about."

There is widely prevalent a notion that birds have no family life; that having fed and trained their offspring until able to fly, the parents suddenly lose the tender love that has governed their conduct, turn into monsters, and drive their young, inexperienced brood out of the nest to take care of themselves; in fact, that family ties do not exist in the bird world.

Nothing could be further from the truth or more unjust to our little brothers. Parental love does not end in the cradle—it begins there, and ties there formed are in many cases as lasting as our own, holding the family together, till, as with us, they are broken by the marriage and new homes of the younger generation. How much longer we are not able to discover.

The most careless observer of bird life must have seen the anxiety of parents upon the first attempts of their nestlings to use their wings, and their grief and distress over any mishaps to them. The various devices of the pair, especially the mother, to conceal or to protect the young, are well known. Most common of these is the one called "trailing," that is, pretending to be hurt and unable to fly, and thus luring the enemy away, in the hope of catching them, till far enough from the exposed youngster. Another way adopted by the cuckoo effects the same object of drawing attention from the helpless infant by a series of clownish poses and antics most curious to witness. Birds that are stronger or bolder will show fight, flying at a man or beast whom they consider dangerous, and always aiming at the eyes, as many a nest robber has learned to his cost. An interesting experience of this sort happened to the late Rev. Samuel Lockwood, in his youth, when trying to capture a nestful of young thrashers. Both par-

ents attacked him savagely, and finding that of no avail, enlisted the whole neighbourhood in their service, bringing a mob about his head that soon brought him to terms. There were cat-birds, wood thrushes, thrashers, and even tiny warblers, at least fifty in all, flying about him, screaming in fury, and all trying to get at his eyes, which he was obliged to protect with the cage he had brought, while, thoroughly ashamed of himself, he hastily replaced the nest and contents.

Other birds, such as the woodcock and the whip-poor-will, have still another means of saving their endangered young—they carry them away; the wood-cock between her feet, and the whip-poor-will, it is supposed, in her wide mouth.

A touching story of the supreme efforts of a mocking-bird mother to save her nestling from captivity was told by an eye-witness. As the would-be captor—the narrator himself—approached the awkward birdling on the ground, the distressed mother flew down, seized him, and carried him ten or twelve feet into the air, and then let him go for dropped him, perhaps. The youngster flew as far as he could, but soon came to the ground, and the enemy at once advanced to take him. Again the mother swooped down, caught up her baby, and gave him another start on his way, all the time uttering cries of the utmost distress. A second and even a third time he fell to the earth, was threatened with capture, and saved by his distracted mother. And then the relator of the incident became ashamed of his errand, and gave up the chase.

Even when, as often happens, the young leave the nest at different times, the family does not become scattered. In all cases that I have observed, the father has taken into his special charge each nestling as it left the home. From the moment of hatching he shares in the labour of feeding, but with the departure of the first little one it becomes his business to attend to it. He goes no more to the nest, but receives and cares for each one as it makes its exit from the nursery, until the last one has joined the little group, when the mother—unless she contemplates a second brood—completes the family circle.

Owing to careless observation in the past this fact is not well known. We often see it stated in books that the oriole disappears after the young have flown, but returns late in the season and sings a little before leaving for his winter home. The faithful father has disappeared from unseeing eyes only. All this time of his silence and apparent absence he has been conducting about, feeding and educating the pretty little group who first saw light in the airy hammock on the elm. A close and loving seeker could have found him any day, going about on the ground in the garden, on bushes or trees, everywhere accompanied by a little flock of now silent but always hungry youngsters; and not until they are trained to provide for themselves has the brave and beautiful bird time to return to his singing on the tree-tops.

All through August one of the prettiest phases of bird life may be enjoyed. Little parties of birdlings, brothers and sisters, going about together, now and then visited by one or both of the elders, but oftener alone, for now they are getting their education in independence. Lovely in their fresh baby dresses, ingenuous in looks, unsophisticated in manners and charming in their show of affection for each other, these little creatures are most bewitching to watch. Little groups of bluebirds may be found in newly cut meadows; small squads of young hermit thrushes haunt the brush in the woods; winter wren babies collect in fussy, fascinating flocks on logs and roots under the trees; sprinkled-breasted young catbirds gather in solitary wild cherry-trees, and kingbird infants sit solemnly side by side on a twig half the day.

An observing eye will notice during August, a little later, that most birds go about in parties of four or six or more, and if his eye is sharp to detect youth and age, either by development of plumage, or by the manners, he will see that they are composed of one pair and their offspring; and if he could keep them under observation through the winter, he would see, in many cases

that we know, the family still keeping together. One may see this easily by watching closely the foreign sparrows of our cities. It will be found that all through the winter the birds are in groups; together they go to the ground for food, together they flit back to the roof or tree. Family parties, the parents and their young. Next spring the young will mate and set up families of their own.

The permanence of bird-marriages, the foundation of family life, is a subject that has aroused great interest and stimulated close study. In the old, hasty way of drawing conclusions, it has been assumed that bird unions were for nesting time only, but closer, intelligent study has proved conclusively that many marriages are for life.

Perhaps we can hardly say they are "for better or worse" as with us, for I notice that divorce is sometimes an arbitrary and very summary performance. Certainly it is so with our foreign sparrows, the only birds I have detected in such proceedings. I have several times seen a sparrow divorce his spouse. Once for an accident to a nestling, and at other times for reasons I could not discover. And once I saw a mother, with a nest full of babies, try to divorce her mate, who had by some accident lost a leg. There really seemed to be some excuse in this case, for her work with that nursery-full was most severe. But though spruce young bachelors came about, quite ready to woo the matron and undertake their share of the family cares, the little sufferer refused to be put away. He attacked and discouraged every fresh candidate for matrimony, and at last recovering sufficiently to resume his duties as provider, his mate received him again, and family life went on as before.

One of the most interesting parts of this little drama, to the study of which I gave most of two days, was the conversation between the pair. When she could leave her work a moment, she would alight beside her drooping spouse and talk in low tones, not in the least angry, nor scolding, but as if reasoning or explaining the necessity of her having help, for always in the bird-world the welfare of the young is the first consideration. To all her volubility he answered now and then a single word, but evidently not one of consent, for as each fresh candidate appeared, he aroused himself, and disputed his claim. In the cases where the lord and master divorced his mate, he did it with a storm of scolding and harsh chatter worthy the traditional fishwife.

That marriages are permanent has been decided from close observation in many different bird families. Major Bendire, a careful and trustworthy ornithologist, places on the list several hawks and owls, and some of the grouse. Mr. Hudson, another authority, says that a large proportion of one family, comprising several hundred species, pair for life. Other students of bird life have added the song sparrow, the dignified cardinal grosbeak, the jolly flicker, the sweet singing meadow lark and thrasher, the catbird and some of the thrushes.

That birds are possessed of individuality, that they have a choice between suitors, that the bride is won by effort, and that there are tragedies of rivalry, jealousy, alienated affections, and others, as well as that there are among them opinionated spinsters and incorrigible bachelors, have been amply proved. Hundreds of facts could be cited in evidence. Why then should we doubt that among these human traits should be constancy and steady affection also?

In the month of August bird song is mostly over. All the little dwellers in field and wood are busy putting on their travelling suits for the journey before them. In the long, hot days, if the bird student wanders over his old haunts, looking carefully on the ground, he may pick up here and there a featherly token of the friends he is soon to lose; here a sharply dotted black-and-white feather from downy's wing, there a blue banner or two from the jolly jay; in one nook half a dozen golden trophies from the flicker, and everywhere soft brown and olive, and yellowish, and other neutral tinted badges from breast and body, that he cannot surely identify.

O. T. M.

THE ROMANCE OF IVY MOSS.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE DESPERATE RESOLVE.

TOWARDS five o'clock on a cloudy and chilly afternoon at the beginning of the second week in May, the Earl and Countess of Exe, together with a friend of theirs—a woman who was attired in neat and inexpensive, but well-fitting mourning garments, and who called herself Ida Drew—were standing in a group upon the busy departure platform of a great railway terminus in London.

The young Countess, with a shiver of disgust at the changeable spring weather, had gone back to her richest furs.

The first bell had just been rung for the train that was about to start.

Lord Exe, a sudden thought striking him, made a dash for the bookstall near.

"I think you had better get in now," observed her ladyship in her bright, brisk way.

But her happy blue eyes, as she spoke, Ivy could not help marking, shone curiously, and she pulled down her veil hastily.

"Or you may lose your corner seat; and that, dear, would be a pity now that you have secured it," added Cynthia.

They were close to the carriage door, and Ivy Dundas at once entered the compartment. Cynthia remained standing by the open door.

"Oh, Ivy, my dear, my dear!" exclaimed she, in a forced playful tone—"or ought not I to say, 'my dear Mrs. Drew,' oh! I am forgetting—I am so sorry to lose you! Keep a brave heart, things will come right by-and-by; and—whatever happens to you, do not quite forget your loving old friend, Cynthia!"

"Do not fear," Ivy answered.

Just then it was all that she could say—her heart was too heavy and too full.

The young Countess had held her friend close to her bosom before leaving Valley Grange, for Cynthia was by far too sensible to care for a demonstrative farewell in public.

"Wilton-Magna is your station, Mrs. Drew!" she said then, more cheerily, "don't forget, or you may be taken on to Salisbury."

At the moment back from the book-stall came the good-natured young Earl, just as the last bell was clanging out.

He was laden with all sorts of magazines, society journals, and "shilling dreadfuls," and he heaped them upon the vacant seat opposite to Ivy.

"There, Mrs. Drew," said the young man, shyly; "you won't find the journey dull now, perhaps."

Ivy thanked him with a wan smile—the best she could give him. And then the train began to crawl out of the great dingy station.

"Good luck to you, Mrs. Dundas—Mrs. Drew I mean!" cried Lord Exe, blithely, bare-headed. "All success to you at Huntingtower; and don't let it be long, mind, before we meet again!"

But Cynthia herself now could only kiss her hand in farewell—a silent farewell; her eyes all the while glistening brightly through her veil. Her lips moved—Ivy saw them—that was all.

When—how—would they meet again?

Heaven alone could tell.

With something between a sob and a groan Ivy fell back into her corner, and shut her eyes tight to keep back the tears.

She was journeying to Huntingtower at last! She was scarcely in a mood for the literature with which Lord Exe had so liberally supplied her. In fact, being in no humour whatever for it, she forgot all about it; and where he had piled it, there it lay unheeded.

Ivy looked out of the window listlessly. But the landscape was leaden and uninviting; for the spring east wind was paralysing the earth, and nipping the new born leaves.

So, leaning back in her corner, she closed her eyes once more.

The past week—those last few days of her pleasant sojourn at Valley Grange—had been an active time for Ivy Dundas.

She was going to Huntingtower; and there was much to be done in preparation for the venture.

She was to call herself "Ida Drew," and in every other conceivable direction Mr. Falconer had impressed upon Ivy that she could not be too careful.

In one of her letters to Keith, Ivy had said, somewhat abruptly,—

"And cannot you tell me anything definite about Ronald? Is he still with Court Ravenna? I want to know for many reasons. I do not like being kept in the dark, particularly now that I am starting for Huntingtower. How rash it all seems."

And Keith Falconer had written back speedily: "You may depend upon it, dear Mrs. Dundas, that Ronald is still abroad. Had he been at home in England, we should have seen or heard something of him here in London."

And with this scanty information touching the erratic life and conduct of Ronald Dundas, it seemed that Ivy must for the present be content.

Well, after all, what in the world did it matter to herself where Ronald might be, or what he might be doing?

Were not their lives—his and her own—upon this planet, at all events—parted lives for evermore?

As the day fixed for her departure had drawn near Ivy grew oddly feverish and nervous; often lying wakeful during the greater part of the night, thinking moodily of the ordeal that loomed ahead of her, that every hour in fact was bringing nearer and nearer.

At length she began to fancy that she could not possibly go through with this scheme of Mr. Falconer's.

It was not possible, she told herself.

She must abandon altogether the idea of it—even at the eleventh hour!

However, she said not a word to Cynthia about her increasing uneasiness; for Ivy knew that she would have naught but railery for her poor faint heart, and she felt in no mood for Cynthia's good humoured laughter.

But late one night, alone in her own room, when all the household save herself were in bed, Ivy began to pace restlessly up and down her dressing-room, thinking, ever thinking, of Mrs. Falconer and the gloomy home of the Dundases.

"I cannot do it—I cannot go!" she had exclaimed aloud at last. "No; I cannot—it is of no use. Give up! I must!"

A swift thought flashed into her mind.

She seized her desk.

She placed the candles close to it.

She sat down with writing-paper before her, resolutely, and then and there penned a long letter to Keith Falconer in London.

"I am full of misgiving," she wrote recklessly—"my heart fails me terribly. I feel that after all I cannot go to Huntingtower. Mrs. Falconer does not know the true story of my life. You do not know it."

"Perhaps if you did you would not suffer me to cross the home-threshold of any one of your friends—more especially that of a refined and delicate gentlewoman like Mrs. Falconer."

"Something within me to-night, I know not what, impels me to tell you my life-history. I feel that I cannot rest until it has been told to you faithfully."

"Never to living soul, except Ronald—not even to Lady Eke—have I once spoken of the cruel past which is mine; never until this hour, when I take up my pen to lay bare to your eyes the dark and dreadful truth."

Then followed Ivy's free confession—the story of Ivy Moss.

"Say now," she ended, as recklessly and as abruptly as she had begun her letter, "whether or not I shall go to Huntingtower; whether or not you deem me a fit associate for a gentlewoman like your friend Mrs. Falconer."

On the day before Ivy quitted Valley Grange his answer to her confession arrived.

What would Keith say?

In what manner, in what tone, would he write to her, now that he had learned the shadowed secret of her life?

With quivering hands Ivy broke open the envelope, and, thank Heaven, was quickly assured!

It was an eloquent, manly letter, strong in expressions of indignation and surprise. His amazement at all that Ivy had told him; his hot anger at Ronald's unsearchable indifference in the vital matter of searching out the mystery of her birth, were plainly too deeply felt for ordinary language.

Ronald's unnatural selfishness throughout had been worse than cruel, worse than cowardly. Keith said—it was barbaric. He could not have believed it possible even of Ronald Dundas!

"You the daughter of Daniel Moss, of Dell Cottage! Great Heaven! Mrs. Dundas, the supposition is preposterous—he a convict on ticket-of-leave, thief, burglar, suspected murderer! Never will I believe it! Take comfort; be brave."

"Should I be alive six months hence I will have proved the whole matter to be a lie. As I write to you I am on the eve of starting for a trip to America, in company with an old friend of mine, whose people have been for long resident in Boston."

"It is a somewhat sudden determination on my part, I am aware; but the opportunity seems to me too good a one to be disregarded. In all likelihood we shall be absent from England until the autumn, because my friend talks seriously of journeying to the Far West for a glimpse of San Francisco, the Yosemite Valley, Nevada, and other places of renown—taking Chicago en route."

"But trust me, Mrs. Dundas—even should I fail to write to you from across the sea. The day on which I live to return to England, on that self-same day will I set to work to unravel this tangled web of your life."

"I will take upon myself, if I may, to do that which should long ago have been done by Ronald Dundas. With Heaven's help and guidance I will prove to yourself and to the world that you are no offspring of the reprobate and outlaw, Daniel Moss. Go to Huntingtower without fear, and prosper!"

Having read this letter of Keith Falconer's Ivy had dropped upon her knees, and the tears had flowed freely—stem them she could not.

Could her friend, indeed, bring this miracle to pass! Ferrently prayed she that he might—Heaven bless and help him in the noble work!

And on the following day, with a lighter heart, she had packed her trunks for Huntingtower.

In reverie, in busy retrospection, time soon flies.

Ivy started in her corner of the railway carriage, and looked somewhat dazedly around her. The train had stopped at a small country station, and a porter was shouting,—

"Wilton-Magna!"

Besides Ivy herself, there were only two or three other passengers who alighted at Wilton-Magna station—countifried looking folk, with carpet-bags and brown-paper parcels, who quickly vanished on their several ways.

The train, too, soon moved on again, disappeared, and Ivy was left solitary upon the gravelled walk of the platform.

And then the porter came up and informed her that if she was the lady they were expecting "over at Huntingtower" there was a carriage, with a cart for the luggage, waiting for her outside the station.

So the porter, leading the way, opened the brougham door, and the fat, ruddy old coachman on the box just looked over his shoulder, and said interrogatively—

"Mrs. Drew?"

"Yes," replied Ivy quietly, but not without a qualm: "Mrs. Drew."

Speaking, she stepped into the carriage, and was at once driven away from the draughty, white way-side building.

It was kind and considerate of Mrs. Falconer, she was thinking, to send so snug a vehicle to meet her on this bitter spring evening; and Ivy placed her feet gratefully on the hot-water stool, and drew up the magnificent bearskin rug around her knees. Doubtless, she thought, Keith Falconer had given his kinswoman at Huntingtower

to understand that "Ida Drew" must be regarded as no ordinary dependant.

How like him! How like his forethought for the comfort of others!

After driving for a couple of miles or so the brougham turned in at the lodge gates.

The road hitherto had been tolerably level travelling, the carriage-way in the park seemed suddenly to grow steep. Then they once more drove along briskly, now through thickly-timbered land, until presently the ground dipped gradually again, and Ivy found that they were going down hill.

As she stepped from the brougham there was opportunity and light enough for a glance at her surroundings.

The mansion of Huntingtower, Ivy perceived then, was very large, very sombre looking, altogether baronial. The solid masonry might once upon a time have been bright red; now, however, weather-beaten and time-stained, the walls were russet-tinted, and quite hidden in many parts by the knotted stems and ever-growing foliage of creepers that were nearly as ancient as the walls of the mansion itself.

A roomy bricked terrace flanked the western side of Huntingtower; but the flag-stones and the great buttresses of it looked equally damp and moss-stained, and there was a sad, neglected air about the pleasure and its sun-dial which lay there so stilly beneath that huge old terrace-wall.

And this great old quiet house, with its many shuttered windows and hushed forlorn aspect was the home of Ronald Dundas!

Would he ever again enter it? wondered Ivy to herself idly.

And what would he say if he knew that she, Ivy, his wife—for the time calling herself Ida Drew, and the salaried attendant and companion of his aunt, Isobel Falconer—was about to step across its silent threshold?

Somehow all nervousness and dread were wholly gone now; and Ivy felt strangely calm and satisfied in her new and most curious position.

Oddly enough, she remembered at the moment her volume of Rossetti which she had left behind her with Cynthia at Valley Grange; and she mused aloud to herself, scarcely knowing that her lips moved:

"I have been here before,
But when, or how, I cannot tell!"

A remarkably neat and old-world dame—small, noiseless, active—opened the hall door and swept back some heavy drapery for Ivy to enter; and greeting the stranger in quite a motherly fashion, that had, however, nothing of an undue familiarity in it, she led her forthwith upstairs to the second floor.

They met not a soul on their upward way thither. All was silent, fragrant, reposeful.

Perhaps the luxurious carpets and draught-curtains which appeared to be everywhere around them deadened all sound within the rooms beyond.

Yes, thought Ivy dreamily, it was in some sweet, strange way like "coming home."

"I have been here before,
But when, or how, I cannot tell!"

she murmured again unconsciously.

Her guide conducted her to a commodious and most comfortable apartment, which looked down upon the western terrace and the forsaken pleasure-bench at it.

It was in reality half bed-chamber, half sitting-room, wide and lofty; a bright wood-fire burned in the low grate; a cosy meat-tea was spread invitingly upon an oval table at the hearth-side.

Ivy became aware that the little old dame was regarding her with a rather anxious look.

"My dear," whispered the old lady, "I am only Mrs. Whinney, the housekeeper—I have lived here nearly all my life. And so, you mustn't take offence or mind me—"

"Ah, yes," Ivy put in, smiling absently as she looked at her neat and pleasant-aided old companion, "of course you are Mrs. Whinney, the housekeeper. I thought so!"

"Mr. Keith Falconer, I presume, madam, mentioned my name to you?" questioned the little old woman, with a sunny smile back.

"Yes—he did, more than once," Ivy replied slowly; "and I was thinking, too, that I had seen you before—somewhere. But it is not possible, I know," she sighed.

"Well, hardly, ma'am," said Mrs. Whinney, doubtfully. "As I remarked to you just now, I have lived here at Huntingtower nearly all my life; and I don't believe that I've been a dozen times away from the dear old place since I was a young woman of thirty or thereabouts."

"No—naturally it was only my fancy," said Ivy Dundas dreamily; forgetting absolutely at the moment that she was now "Ida Drew."

"My dear," said the little old woman, somewhat nervously, "do you think—do you think you'll stop with us?"

"Here at Huntingtower, do you mean?" said Ivy.

"Yes, here at Huntingtower," answered Mrs. Whinney.

"I—I hope so. I should like to. It—it all depends," said Ivy, in a low tone, and a little incoherently; remembering that it is, alas, the unforeseen which always comes to pass!

"Because—because I think the dear mistress will like you and take to you, madam," explained Mrs. Whinney, gently. "The solitude and dulness of Huntingtower frightened all the others away."

"Neither solitude nor dulness will frighten me," said Ivy, with her sad smile, "if I am frightened away, Mrs. Falconer's other companions."

"I am glad to hear you say that," answered Mrs. Whinney, earnestly, "very glad." And then the old lady prepared to depart, promising to look in again, after tea, to take "Mrs. Drew" to the apartments of "the dear mistress," who was waiting to see her new companion.

A clock on the mantelpiece of Ivy's spacious old room was chiming the half hour after eight when Mrs. Whinney reappeared.

"Are you ready, madam?" she said, cheerfully.

"Quite ready," said Ivy, rising. The natty old housekeeper started visibly. She gave the new companion an admiring glance from head to foot.

"I did not think you were so handsome, Mrs. Drew, when I saw you just now with your things on!" she exclaimed, involuntarily.

"Handsome!" repeated Ivy, half-bitterly, half-carelessly. "Yes; I believe I was handsome—once."

"Once! Tut, tut! There, come along," said the little old woman, briskly. "We must not keep the dear mistress waiting any longer."

They descended to the first floor; and stopped presently at a shadowy archway, draped heavily with hangings of rich claret-coloured cloth.

The housekeeper swept apart the curtains; and revealed the mighty almost square oaken door behind them.

"These," whispered she, "are Mrs. Falconer's rooms. Poor soul! One may say, and truthfully, that her life has been spent within them—since—the loss of her only child. Come, Mrs. Drew!"

CHAPTER XX.

ISOBEL FALCONER.

"Hark, madam," Ivy heard the housekeeper announcing softly, "is Mrs. Drew."

And having thus introduced the stranger the little old dame, making no sound, vanished.

Then Ivy found herself alone and unsupported in the presence of Isobel Falconer.

It was a fine room, she saw, spacious, lofty, though somewhat out of date perhaps in its solid Philistine comfort, which was hardly to be wondered at as things were now at Huntingtower, and with a faded old-world air pervading it that was at once homelike and delightful, Ivy thought.

The long drapey about the narrow and desolate windows, she noticed, was of claret-coloured

cloth, like that of the hangings in the corridor outside. The carpet beneath one's feet was as thick and soft as wool-moss in the early spring.

A subdued tinted light—like the light that slants through some faintly-pictured cathedral window when touched by the westering sun—fell around Ivy from the shaded lamps which illuminated the room.

Upon a capacious old-fashioned sofa wheeled near to the hearth, with its shining brass andirons supporting a couple of burning logs, lay Mrs. Falconer; a woman evidently some years past middle-age, and indeed looking much older than she actually was.

She was so thin and fragile in appearance that the jewels she wore upon her wrists and fingers seemed to Ivy's pitying gaze early out of place—too painfully large and heavy altogether for the delicate hands of the wearer.

But, with the jewels, she wore a great quantity of exquisite lace—a filmy hood of it graced her silvered hair; the loose dressing gown or tea-gown, whichever it might be, that she was robed in, seemed composed of nothing else. And this wealth of most beautiful lace became Isobel Falconer perfectly.

The steel embroidered points of tiny slippers just peeped from beneath the hem of her gown.

For a few seconds Ivy stood there irresolute and trembling, upon the exact spot where Mrs. Whinney had left her.

Tremulous—yes. But not nervous.

Unless it was a kind of acute nervous joy, which thrilled so strangely every vein in her body.

In that very first moment of her meeting with Isobel Falconer Ivy's heart told her that she would be happy at Huntingtower—that learning to love the worn and suffering woman upon the couch before her would be for her the simplest lesson that life could appoint.

With sudden yearning did the whole soul, indeed, of Ivy Dundas go out to Isobel Falconer.

Was it more than common sympathy—more than common love?

Ah, what was it?

Ivy could not tell. She knew not. All that she did know was—the swift-growing love and longing were there.

"Mrs. Drew"—the voice that fell upon the warm and fragrant silence was low, gentle, sweet, with no note in it either of querulousness or of complaint—"Mrs. Drew, will you not come nearer! I want to look at you. Take this chair—here—will you?"

The seat she indicated with her jewelled hand was by the couch side.

Then Ivy advanced quietly over the moss-like carpet, and sat down by Isobel Falconer.

She looked long and earnestly upward into the face of Ivy Dundas—a silent, searching look that Ivy met, smiling a little, and fearlessly, though once more that glad yet quite indefinable tremor was quivering through every vein.

Suddenly, with a slow, sweet smile, Mrs. Falconer put out her wasted hand, adre with its beautiful gems.

Ivy clasped it tenderly—nay, more, with something akin to reverence she bent her head and kissed it.

Isobel Falconer smiled—looked pleased.

"Our mutual friend, Mr. Keith Falconer, assured me that I should not be disappointed in you," she observed gently. "And do you know, I feel already that he will prove a true prophet! He has been very good."

"Very good," Ivy murmured.

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Falconer, in the same winning tone, "for asking a few of what may appear to you unnecessary and impertinent questions. Lately, you see, I have been really too ill to write to you. I have trusted solely to my kinsman, Keith Falconer. He is going—or has already gone—on a tour in America, through the Western States—is he not?" she queried, rather abruptly.

"Yes. Something of the kind, I believe," answered Ivy, very low.

"I think I understood him to say in one of his earlier letters that—that you have known better and brighter days, Mrs. Drew! Is that so?"

"My life, dear madam," replied Ivy, unsteadily, "has never been very bright. In my whole life, in fact, so far as it has gone, there has, alas! always been something of shadow—terrible shadow—and little enough of sunshine."

"Poor soul!" said Isobel Falconer, her own fragile hand touching Ivy's compassionately, and tears of sweet pity rising to her worn eyes. "Having known much sorrow myself I can give you real, heart-felt sympathy. Indeed, trouble, in its most afflictive form, has been a frequent guest here at Huntingtower. And you are a widow, Mrs. Drew!" she added unexpectedly. "Mr. Falconer hinted as much—I believe. I understood from him that you had lost your husband!"

"Yes," Ivy faltered, when she felt that she could speak with self-command. Ah, that was not she worse than in widowed plight?

"And—forgive me—you have lost, too, your little son—your only child?"

"Yes," cried Ivy desolately—"only a few brief months ago. The loss of him nearly killed me—sometimes I wish that it had. I am wearing this," touching her black gown, "for my little boy."

"Poor soul," whispered Mrs. Falconer again; her weak voice broken and pathetic, "how I feel for you—how I feel for you! Doubtless you have heard that—that, years ago, a similar crushing loss fell to my own lot, Mrs. Drew!"

"Dear madam," said Ivy, "I have heard so."

"And—although it all happened so many years ago," went on Isobel Falconer, "the old sorrow seems, even now, still new—it often wakes and cries. I cannot—cannot bear even to speak of it to-day."

"Ah, I can understand!" Ivy moaned, her head drooped and turned aside.

Isobel Falconer pressed her handkerchief hastily to her eyes; and then said more calmly,—

"It is very hard for you, Mrs. Drew, to be compelled to go out into the world to earn your living. Mr. Keith Falconer has explained to me that you are a gentlewoman of high attainments."

"I have worked for my daily bread—for my own and for my little son's—before I came to Huntingtower," Ivy replied, low but distinctly.

"Do you mean in—in a situation of this kind, Mrs. Drew?" the mistress of Huntingtower inquired, with all possible gentleness.

"No," replied Ivy, determined to speak the truth where she could. "I have been obliged to do strange things in my time. I was even driven by necessity to sing in a public place—a kind of variety theatre—for a short while. But the work and the life were hateful to me. I could never go on with it. Had I not come here to Huntingtower, Mrs. Falconer, I should have endeavoured to enter a Sisterhood in London."

"I am glad that did not happen, Mrs. Drew," was the rejoinder of Isobel Falconer. And she spoke almost cheerfully now. "And I hope," she added, "that you like the room which Mrs. Whinney has given you?"

Ivy assured her kind mistress, earnestly, that Mrs. Whinney had provided for her every possible comfort.

"Speaking of that room," continued Mrs. Falconer, "reminds me of something that I had nearly forgotten. That room of yours upstairs, Mrs. Drew, used to be one of a suite once occupied by my unhappy nephew. But I believe the doors of communication are fastened up now. He was terribly wild," sighed Isobel Falconer—"his wildness ruined him. Have you, I wonder, Mrs. Drew, ever heard of Ronald Dundas, my nephew, and Sir Rodrick's grandson and heir?"

Another unexpectedly-direct question! Ivy shrank back in her chair, well out of the touch of the warm rose lamp-light, and somehow managed to say,—

"Oh, yes; I have heard of him."

"Even as quite a young man at college," continued Ronald Dundas's aunt Isobel sadly, "he was irredeemably wild and extravagant—reckless, adventuresome, brave, though I fear, utterly without principle."

"Yet there were times when my father and I



WITH HAGEN AND TREMLING FINGERS IVY UNFASTENED THE LOCKET AND HELD IT CLOSE TO THE GLOWING LAMP.

could not help feeling proud of him, his faults and his follies notwithstanding—proud of his handsome looks, his brilliant manners, his many talents, his singular fascination; and we fondly hoped that ere long he would grow steady, settle down, marry early perhaps; and my father, Sir Roderick, at that time, would have forgiven him almost anything.

"But—hark, Mrs. Drew!"

Having listened intently for some seconds, Isobel Falconer spoke again; though her weak, plaintive voice was now so faint that Ivy was forced to bend over the couch-head in order to catch what she was saying.

She was very pale.

"The wind must have changed, Mrs. Drew. For I can hear the splash of the river. Someone has left open the end window of the corridor—may I ask you to go and fasten it!"

Thankful to escape, glad to be alone, if only for a short while, Ivy hastened out into the corridor, and found that Mrs. Falconer was not mistaken.

The long-arched window at the farther end of it, which, with a stone balcony outside, touched the oaken floor, was partly open.

But it was not until she had come to the open window, and had stepped out for a breath of fresh air upon the balcony, that Ivy herself could hear the splash and roar of rushing water.

Yes; the wind had shifted to the soft south; there was a wan moon in the sky; the night was hushed and mild, though rainy looking.

Recalling to memory the part which the river at Huntingtower had played in the tragedy of Isobel Falconer's life, Ivy returned to the beautiful old room she had left and found its occupant sitting up.

But Mrs. Falconer said nothing more about the sound of the moaning water, nor did Ivy. She merely thanked her nurse-companion for closing the corridor window, at the same time remarking that one of the women-servants was to blame for omitting to make it safe.

"It is my custom to take a little mulled wine at this hour," Isobel Falconer said, "and then I go to bed. Good-night, Mrs. Drew," once more offering her fragile hand, which Ivy covered impulsively with both her own. "Mrs. Whinney will see that you have anything you may wish for—for creature comforts, believe me, you could not be in better hands than here. Kindly ring for my maid before you go; and I hope that you will sleep well on this the first night in your new home."

Her new home!

How sweet in Ivy's ears sounded those three brief words—how strangely sweet! Her new home!

Then for the first time Mrs. Falconer noticed a large plain jet locket which Ivy in those days used to wear on a ribbon around her throat.

"Does that locket contain a—a portrait, I wonder?" asked Isobel Falconer, wistfully.

"Yes," said Ivy, gently—"the portrait of my little dead son."

"He must have been a lovely little soul," Mrs. Falconer remarked, the frankest and sweetest smile in the world lighting up transiently her weary white face, "if he in any way resembled his mother."

"I have heard some people say," Ivy answered dreamily, "that my darling was very like me, his mother. In reality, if there was in him a resemblance to either of us, the little lad was like Ron—like his father," amended Ivy hurriedly.

"May I see?" whispered Isobel Falconer.

Ivy dropped upon her knees by the side of the couch.

With eager and trembling fingers she unfastened the jet locket, and held it by its broad black ribbon, well open, close to the glowing lamp.

Together they bent—Ivy and Mrs. Falconer—over the little tinted picture.

A sharp stifled cry of agony broke all at once from the gray lips of Isobel Falconer.

"How like! how like! My little Ivy! My lost little Ivy!"

And like a dead woman she fell backward upon the silken cushions behind her.

(To be continued.)

WHEN ladies go to buy a dress in Japan they tell the shopkeeper their age, and if they are married or not, because there are special designs for the single and double relations of life, as well as for ages. The consequence of this painful custom is that you can tell the age of every lady you meet, and know whether she is married, precisely as though she were labelled or you were a census-taker.

THERE is a new wick which is made of a sort of clay. The clay when soft has fine vegetable fibre mixed with it, and this is by intense heat burned out. This leaves the clay full of tiny holes or pipes, and through them the flame draws the oil by what is known as capillary attraction. The flame is said to be perfectly odourless, there is no smoke, and the light is clear and white. The wick is practically indestructible, and requires no trimming or care for a long time, and then may, it is said, be placed on a coal fire and burnt out, remaining there until it reaches a clear red heat, almost white. The only objection to these wicks is their extreme delicacy, as a little blow, or dropping them, of course destroys them altogether. In the management of lamps experts say that chimneys should never be touched with water, as it renders them more likely to break. The reason for this is that there are certain portions of the glass that may not have been thoroughly fired. Moisture getting into this is absorbed, and when the chimney becomes instantly hot the expansion cracks the chimney. It is a curious fact that an article in such universal use as a lamp is so little understood and so awkwardly handled.



GASTON SEIZED VIVIEN'S SLENDER WRIST, AND HELD IT AS IN A RED HOT VICE.

JOHN STAUNTON'S WIFE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

(Concluded.)

CHAPTER VII.

THE east winds were howling wildly (like famished wolves let loose) round about the deserted parks and squares, and up and down Piccadilly, making London in March a dreary desert, a civilised and sparsely populated waste, for all wise folk remained within doors, ensconced in the luxurious depths of cosy arm-chairs, wheeled close to playing fires.

But across the Channel life wore a vastly different aspect. Paris was gay and smiling, overcrowded and redolent of flowers, flooded by warm spring sunshine in the day, ablaze with electric lamps at night—always bright and brilliant—prodigal of joys and pleasures for those who sought a refuge within her hospitable walls from the winds, the weather, the troubles and cares of the bleak, wide world beyond.

"You think, then, the improvement is decided, and as rapid as can be expected, eh?" questioned Miss Prior of the tall, starched *medecin* in a blue frock coat, as, holding his glossy hat with its deeply-curled brim in a gingerly fashion between his finger and thumb, the man of physic followed his patient's eldest daughter out of the Doctor's chamber into a large, gorgeously-furnished private sitting-room of the Hotel Continental.

Monsieur le Docteur replied, in the purest Parisian, that he had every cause to congratulate himself so far upon the effect of his treatment.

Monsieur's progress was marked, undoubted; whether hope might yet be entertained of the ultimate recovery of his sight, ah! that was another question *entirely*, to which time alone could reasonably be expected to make reply.

Meanwhile, could we not always hope! This blessed privilege, under all circumstances, still remained humanity's portion.

Finally, "Good morning, ladies! good morning!" Then as Vivien—who had been sitting thus far silent by the stove, with her head bent over her work—glanced up and returned the doctor's leave-taking, his professional eye lighted with much concern and stern disappointment upon the deathly pallor of Mrs. Staunton's ever-delicate cheeks; upon the languor of her once brilliant eyes, upon the wasted form and dejected air, which all too plainly told of anguish and of suffering—mental not less than physical.

Yet to the well-meant and anxious inquiries of Esculapius Vivien returned the self-same stereotyped reply with which she was invariably wont to parry all inquiries.

"She was quite well! Nothing ailed her! All he—or any other—could do to serve her and promote her comfort was to leave her in peace, and—and not worry her!"

Yet "one little word" the good man whispered into Miss Prior's ear at parting—a word which disquieted Josephine to no ordinary degree—for as she glanced at Vivien's altered features and shrunken form she seemed to read confirmation sure of the doctor's ominous warning, written in characters clear and unmistakable upon the lineaments she held the dearest in the world.

"She has the air—Madame, your sister—of one who departs!" the oracle had murmured, with a significant elevation of his brows and shoulders and one long-nailed digit, pointing emphatically heavenwards, as though to denote that to the professional eye the incipient signs of sprouting wings were already palpably apparent. "Have a care, Mademoiselle, lest she escapes us unawares! For my part, I would sooner insure Monsieur, your father's life!"

But Vivien continued to protest almost fretfully that she was well enough—far better than she cared to be!

Surely life was scarce worth living (she, at

any rate, was weary of the farce), much less making such a fuss and fume about! Only "let her be!"

"Well, I shall feel it my duty to call John's attention to your white face and your evident loss of strength!" Josephine returned in decisive tones.

Albeit, inwardly she quaked, for John Staunton's name in these days was rarely mentioned between the sisters, and she was doubtful as to the effect her words might probably produce.

"John!" Vivien echoed, bitterly, with curling lip and flashing eyes, momentarily reminding Josie of the sister she sometimes felt constrained to mourn as dead. "John! Do you think it would seriously disquiet him to learn I was slowly, surely 'drifting awa' to the land o' the leal'! Do you suppose he would so far relax or unbend from his attitude of outraged virtue and righteous indignation as to affect an interest he does not feel in the health of the wretched woman who is in name his wife! the living log, to whom he is bound by law; that clog upon his movements and worldly advancement, from which he yet is impotent to effect escape through the horror of what he terms 'public exposure and scandal!' You do John Staunton grave injustice, Josie, if you deem him thus pitifully weak! I should have thought you knew my husband, as well as I your brother-in-law; and knowing him, could not so grievously have misjudged him as to suppose it possible he—"

"Vivien! Vivien! now, as ever, 'tis you who cruelly misjudge John! You who wrong the best and noblest man who ever lived! Think how sorely he has been tried! through how terribly fierce an ordeal of suffering he has passed! And yet, since the hour of your reconciliation, has he ever murmured one reproach! Has he once upbraided or reminded you, of—of the horror of the past!"

"No," Vivien retorted, swiftly, with flashing eyes, "because he has been too callous and too cold! As he explained to me then (you know when I mean," and involuntarily the poor girl

shuddered at the recollections her own words evoked), "he allowed me to resume my place, in order to spare a dying man (we all thought father's days were numbered then), in order to save his own honour, to shield his own name from publicity and disgrace! Those were his motives! He made no secret of them."

"If you and I stood alone together upon this earth, Vivien" (those were his very words), "you would be henceforth dead to me in actual fact—dead as all remembrance of your duty towards the absent must have been, when—bah! why recapitulate all that!" she broke off, shivering; for in truth, she lacked courage to repeat the bitter, fateful words which should once more recall all too vividly the tragic, terrible past. "But I am not complaining," she went on wearily. "No doubt I have not suffered even yet according to my actual deserts; only—only I would far sooner he had struck me, reviled me, murdered me then and there, rather than have commented this hollow peace, which is slowly torturing me to death!"

It was not often she spoke so unreservedly to that generous-hearted sister, whom for so many years wilful, wayward Vivien had so cruelly and wantonly misjudged.

Small wonder, then, that Josephine was positively startled by the fierce emphasis with which this low-toned distaste was delivered by the white lips which so rarely now gave voice to aught beyond the merest stereotyped commonplace.

"Desist," she whispered, drawing nearer, "let me tell John that you suffer from his coldness and indifference! Give him some sign yourself that you are contrite, that—"

"Contrite! who says that I am contrite!" Vivien echoed, angrily. "Who imagines that I—a woman—shall condescend to the meanness of suing for a man's love! Nay, I have been wont to see supplicants prone at my feet! to accede, not to petition! And if, indeed, I am at times haunted by vain and bitter regrets, they are, believe me, because of—of frustrated hopes, because of possibilities blighted! I might have been so happy—I might have—"

"Vivien, Vivien! you do not realise the meaning of the wicked words you utter! You were mercifully snatched from sin, like a brand plucked from the burning—rescued—"

"Won't English gentlemen!" gravely announced the gargon (advertised to "speak English") throwing open the door at this juncture, and advancing towards Miss Prior, bearing a card upon a salver. "Hec inquiry weaver—"

"Sir Archibald Hope!" Josephine exclaimed, as she raised the pasteboard, a warm flush mounting to her very temples, a glad light dawning in her eyes. "Oh, how pleased papa will be! Show the gentlemen up, Armand, and—"

"Ah! let me first escape!" cried Vivien, starting to her feet. "I could not bear to meet Sir Archie! His very name is hateful to me, associated as it is with the most terrible memories of my life!"

So when the baronet was ushered in Josephine stood alone, smiling, blushing (as he bent almost double over her white hand), declaring in one breath "how very pleased" she was to see him, in the next inquiring "what on earth had induced him to come?"

"Well, Paris is the refuge of the—the aimless, the purposeless, the indolent of earth!" Sir Archibald protested, evasively; he threw himself upon the crimson satin fauteuil indicated by his hostess. "And I—well, I'd got sick of my grandmother's place up in the Highlands. London just now is neither more nor less than a howling wilderness. Westlands represents the abomination of desolation; with all the rectory blinds down, and — and so — well, as I'd nothing better to do, I thought—don't you know—oh, you understand! That falling any more serious object in life for the moment, I'd—well, I might as well run across the Channel and see what was going on at Paris, having friends there too!" he added, significantly, smearing a short laugh, intended to round this slightly involved period ably, but which significantly failed to accomplish his purpose; for even to his own ear it sounded so forced and

strained that its only effect was to add materially to the unusual embarrassment under which Sir Archie momentarily laboured.

Josephine, feeling her own heart flutter strangely, considerably glanced aside, took up the *Figaro*, looked for the paper-knife, and in due course proceeded (with surely unnecessary care) to cut it flimsy pages.

Then, after a few conventional remarks, Sir Archie laid his hat and cane aside, resumed his normal *débonnaire* manner, and conversation drifted naturally in due course into less artificial channels.

The young man rejoiced unfeignedly to hear of the good Rector's restoration to comparative health and strength; his eyesight for the present was entirely lost, however, concussion of the brain having left him completely blind. Hopes were, nevertheless, still entertained of his ultimate recovery of the use of his left eye, at any rate; and it was in order to consult a celebrated Parisian oculist, Josephine explained, that the family from Westlands had taken up their quarters at the *Hôtel Continental*.

"I say 'family' advisedly," she added, laughing. "For we are all here, you know—the whole strength of the company! Papa can scarcely bear Vivien's absence for an hour. It seems that when there was some idea—in the summer, if you remember—of Mrs. Staunton's joining her husband out in Nicaragua, the notion of a possible separation from his favourite child preyed sadly on the old man's mind, although he never permitted himself to confess as much, for we both thought—er—humpf!—that it would have been wiser perhaps for her to go! So whilst he lay delirious the terrible dread possessed him that Vivien had sailed for the New World, and that he should never see her more. His ravings and regrets were indescribably painful, and made such an impression upon my sister, that ever since his recovery it has been a matter of some difficulty to induce her to stir from his side. My place, naturally, is likewise there; and as John has business with which he could occupy himself in France, he decided to come with us rather than be stranded at home alone; so we emigrated in a body, as you see; and really the change, and this wonderful doctor's régime, have done papa such an immensity of good that we can only congratulate ourselves on having made the move!"

"And Mr. and Mrs. Staunton! Forgive the point-blank question, my dear Miss Prior; but after having been so intimately associated with you in your hour of trouble, it would now be folly for me to attempt to ignore all knowledge of the past, particularly," he added in a lower voice, and with a world of meaning in his eyes, "as I am deeply interested—necessarily so—in all which concerns the welfare of those dear to you!"

Josephine's heart beat strangely. Involuntarily she glanced aside.

What meant that strange expression in his eyes!—the tremulous intonation of his voice! Ah! she dared not attempt to analyse, still less did she venture to hope.

She had been so cruelly disappointed and disillusioned more than once, poor girl, that she had come to believe at length that her path henceforth through life was to lay for ever through the narrow, sandy-beaten tracks of duty—never along that fragrant, devious "primrose path," where roses bloom and the mavis and the thrush carol, and even the sunshine hath a peculiar radiance born of the ambient atmosphere of love!

"I know not what to say of them!" she answered, mournfully. "John acted nobly, so at least it seemed to me; and from the hour when Vivien and he entered the rectory together no allusion to the past, she tells me, has ever passed his lips. After you left them at the Alexandria it seems a terribly painful scene ensued. John told her that, for my father's and for all our sakes, she should resume her former place in this household; but that from that moment his wife was dead to him as though she lay buried in her grave! And dead to him as wife, Vivien assures me, she ever since has been,

John is cruelly, fatally 'kind,' if you can understand me; kind as a brother, polite as a friend, ostentatiously attentive, but alas! only as man to woman—with a superb indifference over all, which in another I should say amounted to absolute apathy, so callous, hard, and frozen, his manner has become! It seems difficult to realise that those two were ever lovers, much less that they must still remain indissolubly unsuited till the end—husband and wife till 'death do them part!'"

"Sad, most sad," the Baronet returned, musingly. "Yet they are both still so young that you must not lose heart and hope entirely, Miss Prior; something sooner or later must startle them out of this unnatural frame of mind, and put an end to a completion of affairs as unendurable as abnormal, take my word for that."

"Ha! you do not understand John!" Josephine replied, with a despairing sigh. "He seems made of iron; his resolution once taken is unalterable! I, who know how passionate was his attachment to my sister, find myself looking at him sometimes, and wondering if it is possible that he ever loved his wife! For the traces of mental suffering, anguish, misery, are all so plainly depicted on her lovely face, that, even a stranger gazing at her, it seems to me, must feel his heart moved to pity, interest, sympathy with the unknown sorrows of one so pathetically beautiful; so hopeless, yet so young! How John can spend his life with her, and ignore all that is written on her features; all that her weary voice, her languid movements, her dejected mien convey is more than I can understand. I am free to confess that there come moments when I myself feel as though—as though I should absolutely grow to hate him," she added, lowering her voice mysteriously, and clasping her hands with a faint involuntary shudder, "because of this stolid, unmoved calm; even though I firmly believe him the best and truest-hearted man on earth!"

This painful interview was abruptly terminated by the entrance of Mr. Prior's valet. The convalescent had heard from Vivien of the arrival of the baronet, and now sent to inquire whether Sir Archibald were charitably disposed to bestow an hour of his leisure in beguiling the tedium of the afternoon for his old friend.

It is needless to add that the young man rose with alacrity to obey this summons, and that he was henceforth a daily—sometimes, indeed, almost an hourly—visitor, to that noble suite of apartments occupied by "de famille Engleash" (we quote Armand), located in those sweet spring days at the *Hôtel Continental*.

CHAPTER VIII.

VIVIAN sat alone by the gorgeous gilded stove, one dull afternoon, some few days later. Sir Archibald had called an hour earlier to take the Rector for a drive in the Bois; but Josephine only had accompanied the gentlemen. Vivien, pleading headache and disinclination for the daily raree-show, had been reluctantly left to solitude.

"A visitor for me, Armand!" she echoed, wearily, as the ubiquitous gargon bowed low, and presented a foreign-looking card. "Le Comte de Chambri! I don't know the name! Someone for Monsieur Staunton probably. Say my husband is not at home."

"But non—off Madame bout excuse—'twas de ladie Monsieur demandé—Madame Staunton—oh! quite sure quite! Noa mistak' at all—'twas Françoise Monsieur spoke—impossible, therefore, to mak' error!"

"Show him up then, Armand," Vivien returned; and even as the words left her lips, just as Armand's rusty black figure was disappearing behind the *portière*, the curtain was flung back, and the unexpected visitor glided noiselessly into the room.

A bitter cry escaped Vivien's lips, as she started to her feet.

"Gaston!—is it possible!"

"More—it is a fact!" returned that hero,

bowing low; and even as he raised his head, and drew himself up to his full height, Vivien was startled,—nay, absolutely horrified—to note the extraordinary change so brief a time had effected in his outer man; for De Laurnay appeared unnaturally gaunt and aged.

He was, moreover, clothed in deepest mourning, which rendered the ghastly pallor of his complexion terribly apparent; his eyes were sunken beneath his dark overhanging brows; there was not a superfluous ounce of flesh on his bones, upon which his well-cut garments hung loose and shapeless, as though they served to drape a rail.

The metamorphosis was sufficiently significant and appalling. Vivien involuntarily recoiled, as much conscience-stricken as alarmed, perhaps, at that first moment of recognition of the man who had exercised so fatal an influence over her life-long fate.

"Ah! you do well to shudder at sight of me—Nemesis in the flesh! If I held a flaming sword or a poisoned dagger in my hand, Madame you could scarcely feel amazed."

"Nothing would amaze me, sir, on the part of one," Vivien returned, icily, drawing up her slender figure to the utmost, and steadfastly returning De Laurnay's gaze, for there was an undercurrent of menace in his voice which acted as a spur to slumbering indignation, and bade pride arm itself at every point, "who is unmanly enough to intrude, under cover of a feigned name, into the presence of—"

"Hold, there!" he interrupted, imperiously, pointing to the card; "this is my rightful name and title. Through the death of a distant relative I have succeeded to the estates in Picardy, and henceforth I am Comte de Chambri!"

Vivien bowed her head in token of mute acquiescence; then, after a moment's pause, seeing that he uttered no further word, she inquired calmly,—

"And what, may I venture to ask, does Monsieur le Comte de Chambri demand of me?"

For one moment still he paused, an expression so ferocious momentarily gathering in his eyes, whilst he ground his teeth beneath the shadow of his dark moustache, and impotently clenched both bloodless hands, that even Vivien's brave heart quailed.

She had been prepared from the onset for reproaches, recrimination, invective and abuse; but this—this nameless "something" which she beheld hovering ominously on Gaston's brow, made her very blood run cold within her veins, her pulses cease to throb.

"You dare ask me that! What I demand of you? The fulfilment of your promise, woman—your promise to share my life; the restitution of my shattered peace, and hopes, and happiness—my vanished joy in every day calm, quiet, and content! Of all these you have robbed me, Vivien. I come, now, to demand them back again from those white, cruel hands!"

"Gaston!" she cried, momentarily moved to weakness by the piteous break in his voice; "surely you know not, or you momentarily forget who I am, and where we are! You are in John Staunton's rooms—you are using strange, unpardonable language to his wife—"

He interrupted her by a hoarse, fiendish laugh, which rasped her delicate ear. He seized her by one slender wrist, and held it as in a red hot vice, which seemed to sear her flesh—gazing the while down into her face with an expression upon his own which haunted Vivien strangely in the years ahead, which surely, to her dying day, she may never more forget.

"Forget, do I! even as you forget when you fled from the danger of meeting him to the haven of my arms! No, Vivien, believe me, only when breath fails me shall I cease to remember that you are in truth John Staunton's wife. Have you not robbed my days of happiness, my nights of peace!—the sunshine of all warmth for me, the flowers of fragrance, spring of joy! Ah! have you not wrecked and maimed my life, and made me the wretched, hopeless, helpless thing you see before you now! This being so, dare you ask me whether I forget!"

"Gaston! Gaston!" she fairly wailed, flinging her arms aloft one moment only to wring her hands the next in impotent despair; "these

wild and futile words avail you nought; for Heaven's sake be calm! All I meant was to remind you of where we are, of who I am, that—that my husband at any moment might return, and Heaven help us both if—if John should find you here!"

"You cannot think I fear him—that white-livered Englishman who could voluntarily cross the seas, leaving his bride behind! His must be a well-regulated mind indeed; he will pause to consider, weigh his words, arrange his plans of actions well. He would be prudent, cautious, no matter how, when or where he may meet his deadliest foe, or what the provocation he received. Pharaoh! a fig for your legal lord and master! I care not how soon he appears upon the scene! You will be so good, madame, as to present me to him when Mr. Staunton arrives."

"Gaston! are you mad!" she gasped, startled into protest by the calmness and decision with which these last words were uttered. "Present you to my husband! How is that possible! and—to what end! If even—"

"You will introduce the Comte de Chambri!" he returned, deliberately, but with an air of sullen menace, as he once more took up the card and flipped it with the thumb and forefinger of one hand, the while he held it gingerly in the other. "The name will be unfamiliar as the man to Monsieur, your husband. Say I am a friend of—whom you will, that matters little. To what end? You question why. That I may have the felicity of visiting you often, there and then. My rooms adjoin your own, madame—one balcony skirts both (which overlook the courtyard only, as you have perhaps observed). You are frequently alone, I know. Your husband is generally absent, and often, as to-day. I watch your sister and your father roll off from the door in a carriage together on such occasions—"

"Coward!" she hissed, fiercely between her teeth. "So you think to scare and intimidate a helpless, unprotected woman! The threat is worthy of—of your nationality, worthy of—"

"Scare! Intimidate! Who used such terms! The insinuation is your own, madame—not mine. Did I 'scare' you in those bright June days not so long gone by, when we sat together beneath the tress and whispered words of love! Did I 'intimidate' you when you confessed to me that you dared not meet the husband you had grown to fear, and had never really loved! When you admitted you preferred to share life and banishment with me rather than remain to endure the carcases of the man whose name you were doomed to bear! That time is not so long gone by, Vivien—my memory, perchance, is better than your own. But recollect that since that fatal day, when you, or some other, played me false, you have vouchsafed no explanation of your conduct; you have given neither sign of penitence nor token of remembrance. My own letters returned to me unopened—directed in your husband's hand—are the only communications of any sort I have, since that fateful hour, received either from him or you. I waited for his challenge—I waited for your call; neither came, and I am here to know whether—as I have every reason to conclude—your sentiments towards me remain unchanged! You loved me, Vivien, once; that much I cannot doubt; and as I am unconscious of having done aught since those happy days to forfeit your regard, I venture to lay the flattering unction to my soul that you love me still! It is, therefore, in our joint interests, and not by any means in the distinguished rôle your words imply, that I am here to-day. Present me to your husband, and I—"

"But, Josephine—my father!" Vivien gasped, terrified by his manner into some faint endeavour to temporise. "They would recognise you at once, of course, and—"

"Your father is blind, and as for your sister—well, if mademoiselle prove indiscreet, so much the better for my purpose. If she betrays me, and your husband fails to avail himself of the privilege of challenging me, why, as a matter of course, I shall embrace an early opportunity of challenging him! When the issue, I believe, to be a foregone conclusion. I am one of the best shots in Europe, and shall have the honour of

sending a bullet through Monsieur your husband's heart!"

"Gaston, you are mad!" she cried, blanched to the very lips. "Be merciful and—ah! Heaven! I hear voices even now upon the stairs—my father—John! Oh, Heaven, fly! Monsieur De Laurnay, I beseech—"

"You will present the Comte de Chambri to your husband, madam," he interrupted, in low, stern tones, fixing upon her a resolute gaze which chilled her very heart's blood. "Should you fail to do this, Gaston De Laurnay will be proud and happy to avenge the indignity he has suffered by shooting Monsieur John Staunton like a dog!"

Before she could reply the velvet *portière* was pushed aside and the Rector entered on his son-in-law's arm, laughing and chattering with more than his usual volubility.

"Vivien—ha! I know you're there, we heard your voice a moment ago; and—whom have you found to beguile the tedium of your solitude! Well, you must know we stumbled across this 'man' of yours just by the Place de la Concorde, so he charitably undertook to see me home in order to set those other miscreants free. Ha, ha! they've stolen off on foot along the Bois—bound, they declared, for the Cascade! Now it strikes me (for I can see farther through a stone wall than most men, let me tell you—although for the time being they call me blind!)—that Sir Archie and Miss Josie— But ah! by-the-bye, whom have we here! It will be well that I should know, my dear, before I was indiscreet!"

The room was of vast dimensions, and John had been carefully conducting the invalid towards his couch in the accustomed corner, whilst the old man rambled on.

Now for the first time he glanced towards his wife and her visitor, for Vivien and De Laurnay still stood motionless side by side.

One swift appealing glance she shot towards the Comte indescribably pathetic, mutely beseeching as that which momentarily flashes from the glazing eyes of the hunted hare when the dogs are already at her throat; but Gaston stood stern, relentless, and immobile as some grim statue wrought in bronze. Only his nostrils quivered slightly, his brows elevated themselves one hair's breadth; otherwise he made no sign.

Vivien's heart turned sick and cold.

"Monsieur le Comte de Chambri, papa," she faltered; "a—friend of Sir Archibald Hope. He does not speak English."

This with an eloquent gesture towards De Laurnay, who all too quickly grasped the cue.

"So—"

"You will forgive my saying good-day and good-bye in one breath, gentlemen," he supplemented in French. "Madame, your most humble servant! With your permission I—withdraw."

And with a low bow Gaston vanished as both Englishmen politely inclined their heads.

"Humph!" said the Rector, as the *portière* fell back, "his voice seems immensely familiar, though at my acquaintance among aristocrats is limited, I suppose mounseer the Count and I have not met before."

"Are you very tired after your drive, dear papa!" Vivien murmured, with difficulty finding voice. "I—ah, let me arrange the cushions behind your head. So! That is better, is it not! John, will you kindly ring the bell! I think we should all be glad of tea."

John gave vent to his low rare laugh as he instantaneously complied.

"I should not advise your endeavouring to keep the kettle boiling until the return of the rest of the Royal Family," he declared, facetiously. "If I know anything of human nature, I read something in Hope's eyes, about an hour or so ago, which plainly conveyed it was not solely in order to admire the artificial beauties of the Cascade that he was so very volubly Josephine should walk with him through the Bois this afternoon. However, we shall see what we shall see, as the poet says, Armand, let us have tea at once—à l'Anglaise, of course."

CHAPTER IX.

"But very few hours sufficed to prove John Staunton's right to claim credit for a perspicacity he had not hitherto enjoyed, for before the lights were extinguished in the hotel that night Sir Archibald Hope had duly asked and received Mr. Prior's benediction and paternal sanction to make Josephine Lady Hope at no very distant date.

The projected alliance was one calculated to inspire unmitigated satisfaction in every breast, so for the next few days an atmosphere of unusual hilarity and content not unnaturally pervaded that gorgeously furnished "flat," which the Rector facetiously designated "Westlands-super-France."

Every face was radiant with hope, content, and happiness, save that of John Staunton's wife, she alone remained grave to absolute melancholy, white, wan, and obviously preoccupied. The bridegroom elect had seized upon some opportune moment to pass his arm through Staunton's, and murmur confidentially that, as he was so soon to be admitted as a member of the family, he hoped it would not be regarded as unpardonably premature if he presumed so far upon coming events as to protest that he felt personally uneasy and disquieted when he glanced towards Vivien's still beautiful, though now drawn and haggard face.

Josephine too (blushing under the weight of new-blown honours) made bold to approach a theme which she had not dared to broach for long months past, and earnestly besought John to try what solicitude and tenderness might effect, implored him to relax and unbend a trifle, and note the influence his changed demeanour might exercise upon his most unhappy wife.

John bowed darkly.

"Am I not already sufficiently humiliated and abused? Do I not shelter and clothe, feed, and protect a woman whom, like some untutored savage, I captured by strategy, and retained by physical force? Vivien is no unexplicated creature; she is of the world worldly, and knows full well the relative value of position and disgrace. Think, then, how she—she must have loved that foreign scoundrel before she would voluntarily have resigned all the best things, and the sweets of existence, in order to share his life. From shame and ignominy I rescued her, 'tis true. Yet I tore her from the man she loved; on this score I pity and commiserate her—for her misery is obvious; she will never be again the light-hearted woman that she was. She is doomed to suffer all the pangs and pains of a hopeless passion; and is, moreover, bound to endure the constant infliction of my companionship. This (for her own sake) I am powerless to obviate, yet I can, at least, be generous enough to spare her unwelcome caresses, protestations of an affection she has ceased to reciprocate, and all those airs of tender proprietorship, which however precious as pledges of mutual affection, must be galling as fetters and shackles of bondage to the heart which has grown cold and insensible, and no longer throbs responsive to the accents which were formerly as music to the ear.

"No, duty towards both Vivien and myself obliges me to plant myself 'twixt her and what she regards as happiness. This is bad enough; do not ask me to torture her still further, for to a woman who loves one man nothing is so intolerable as the devotion of another!"

In answer to this bitter outburst Josephine had never a word to say.

It seemed to her, moreover, that John was right (as ever), kind, generous, and noble, now that she understood his motives in observing this distant attitude towards his erring wife; for Vivien was, without doubt, still mourning her deprivation of a lover for whose sake she had so evidently deemed the world itself well lost.

So she held her peace, merely murmuring a hope that John would do his best to induce her hapless sister to take that daily exercise and relaxation of which her white, wan face surely testified she stood in urgent need.

"Remember, John, she has not had a single

hour's change or pleasure since—since the day of your return; whilst constant attendance on papa, and incarceration in a sick room, have necessarily told heavily upon her once buoyant temperament.

"Suppose, now, you suggest, John, dear—you, yourself—in your prettiest tones, and with your most insinuating air—" here Josephine smiled archly, and shot a shy glance at her brother-in-law's stern and rigid face—"that Vivien should let you take her to the ball at the Embassy to-morrow evening—No, not by any manner of means to join Archie and myself. We shall have quite enough to do to look after one another, and can't undertake the chaperonage of another man's wife!"

"You must go yourself, of course. A quartette makes a charming party, but who can imagine anything more miserable than a trio at a ball!"

"Take Vivien, John, and see if your heart does not thrill with joy and pride when you hear her pronounced—as she will be of course—the *belle par excellence* of the room! It is the first favour, dear, I have ever asked of you; and, John—little as you guess it—I have borne far more than you imagine for your sake!"

Thus pathetically appealed to, John, after one moment's irresolution, decided that he had no choice but to comply, and scarce an hour later, saw (to his own amazement) Vivien's white face brighten, and her eyes momentarily dilate, as she answered in a low voice, that if her husband "wished it," certainly it would afford her the greatest possible pleasure to accompany him, Sir Archie, and Josie to the long-talked of Embassy-ball.

John chanced to stand perilously near his wife whilst this brief dialogue proceeded, and as she shot one swift, sidelong glance up into his eyes, with something of the resistless coquetry of old, her sweet face flushing rosy red one moment only to grow white as snow the next, an almost irresistible inclination was strong just then upon him to gather in his arms the lovely creature he held so dear, and clasping her tightly to his breast, beseech her to examine well the innermost depths of her heart of hearts, and tell him, once for all, whether some latent spark of love for him did not linger there—a spark which unceasing effort on his part might yet, perchance, fan into a blaze once more.

For ahi! in truth, he would be all content to serve, like Jacob of old, seven years—and seven uncomplainingly—chased by the mere hope of that ultimate guerdon for which his whole soul so ardently yearned!

But then Vivien chanced to bend her head again over the lace-work in her hand; it seemed to John her lips grew stern—her brow clouded, so—with a sigh—he turned away.

His heart just then in truth throbbed wildly, his brain whirled, his pulses beat too madly to admit of his lingering another moment on that perilous vantage ground; he might betray himself and harass her before he could recover self-control.

Yet though John Staunton seized his hat and hurried out—down the sunny, crowded streets leading to the wide and bustling Avenue de l'Opéra—with a sudden mist before his eyes, a bitter, burning lump in his throat, and his breath coming in short, quick gasps, methinks his heart was lighter than it had been for many a long day past, for a glow of hope—no matter of how evanescent a nature—now glided the horizon like a rosy streak, counselling courage and a brave heart to the man, who, for long months had been "sickenings of that vague disease" which mortals call despair.

Vivien would be all his own once more, if only for a few brief hours. She would lean upon his arm, she would look up into his face, her sweet eyes would meet his own, and therein surely she would not fail to read the tragic secret he hugged so close—the secret of his hopeless love, his anguish, his remorse! for in these days, he told himself, that if he had never left his fair young wife alone the life-long fate of both, most probably, would have been far otherwise.

If she smiled upon him, he would so far unbend as to ask her for a waltz; then his arm

would encircle the slender waist he so often longed to clasp; her heart would beat near his own, her sweet breath fan his cheek. This prospect seemed to John well-nigh too full of perilous bliss—perilous, because after a glimpse of Heaven he would all too surely find himself, but a few brief hours later, shivering disconsolately once more outside the gates of Paradise picturing the unattainable joys within.

Nevertheless, for the time being, he walked on air. Paris had never seemed to him so gay and brilliant, the sun so warm, the sky so blue, humanity itself so lovable as during the course of this morning's walk!

He went into the first florist's in the Rue de la Paix, and ordered the choicest bouquet money could command—Parma violets and lilies of the valley, stephanotis and maiden-hair. Vivien was so fond of flowers, and should the belle of the ball be minus a nosegay! Pah! the notion was preposterous, absurd; and—oh! would to-day never wear away! Would to-morrow night ever come!

Ha! all too soon for your peace of mind, John Staunton—as you were speedily destined to discover!

He found Sir Archie in the *salon* upon his return to the hotel, chatting with the Rector, who was unusually loquacious after an excellent lunch, and more pleased than he cared to admit to hear that his younger daughter had been prevailed upon to accede to her husband's wish, and was now busily making preparations for the ball with some show of natural feminine assiduity and interest in the relative merits of tulle illusion, and Gloire de Dijon roses, cream satin and point lace.

Although every painful detail connected with Vivien's flight and providential rescue from perdition (thanks to Sir Archie's timely interference and audacious ruse) had been successfully hushed up, so that not a suspicion of the hideous truth had ever crossed the Rector's mind, yet paternal instinct had long since whispered that all was not well between the daughter so tenderly beloved and the husband with whom she had been so recently reunited.

Mr. Prior had discussed the subject more than once with Josephine, questioned Vivien, tenderly, and continually "sounded" John; but individually and collectively, they had assured him that there was nothing "seriously amiss," counselling "patience," and non-interference, and now already it seemed to the anxious father the turn of the tide had come.

That his younger daughter's marriage had not turned out a more signal success was a source of constant and deep-rooted regret to the good Rector who, moreover, unjustly reproached himself for having urged Vivien to make too precipitate a choice for no worse or better reason than that it had appeared to him the woman who was privileged to share John Staunton's life must perforce have before her as fair a prospect of unmixt happiness as mortal wife dare hope for here below, where matrimonial bliss now-a-days is a commodity inestimably precious in just proportion to its rarity.

But now that "John and the child" were going to a ball together in a rational, comfortable fashion, this first step in the right direction seemed like a prelude of better things to follow, and the Rector's heart swelled high with hope and gratification.

They would catch the sweet infection surely from Sir Archie and Josephine, and starting soberly as husband and wife, return perchance mutually re-enamoured like newly-plighted lovers.

"Yes, a lovely morning, and the Boulevards crammed," John, declared, in cheery tones, advancing towards the gleaming stove, and taking up his stand upon the hearthrug in the proverbial attitude of "the Englishman at home," with his back to the place where the fire ought to have been.

"No, I saw nothing of Josephine—which is strange, if she is shopping, as you say, in the Rue de la Paix; but such a stream of fashionable folk! Gracious me! Damon might easily pass within half a foot of Pythia's elbow and yet

remain unrecognised—the scene is so bewildering.

"I'll tell you, by-the-way, whom I met down by the Louvre—that fellow you introduced to me, Vivien, Comte de Chambri, don't you know?—a friend of Sir Archibald's, you said, I think! and an uncommonly nice fellow."

"Comte de Chambri, a friend of mine!" the baronet echoed, vaguely. "Why, I don't—"

But Vivien glanced up quickly, arresting the tell-tale words upon his lips with a swift agonised glance.

John was standing behind her, so this significant gesture escaped him, and he paused with a smile upon his lips, mute interrogation in his eyes, until Sir Archibald should conclude his sentence.

"Well, old man! You don't—"

"Eh—what! Oh, of course! I was only going to say, don't you know, that I—I didn't recall the name at the moment—all these foreign titles sound so much alike. What sort of fellow may he be?"

"Devilish good-looking, though decidedly 'a foot-in-the-grave young man.' 'Greenery-yallery,' too, to boot, for he's about the colour of parchment. I asked him if he'd been laid up, or was suffering still from any particular malady, for he looks as much like a corpse as a living creature can, and has nothing but skin upon his bones!"

"Ha—dear me! Just so!" Sir Archie acquiesced, vaguely, prompted by Vivien's eloquent eyes, and much disquieted by the seared expression of her bloodless face. "Think I remember now who you mean. Haven't seen him for an age, though. We were boys together, and—all that sort of thing!" he concluded, airily, with a complacent sense of having acquitted himself far more creditably in so difficult an emergency than a man could reasonably be expected to do.

"He took me into the Cercle de l'Union, of which it seems he is a member; and very comfortably the fellows there are located, I can assure you. Might fancy oneself in St. James's! We had a glass of Madeira, looked at the papers, and smoked a cigarette together. I happened to mention we were going to the Embassy to-night, Vivien, and he at once arranged to meet us there. Uncommonly good-natured I call it; for of course I was explaining to him that we scarcely know a soul. He knows all the best set seemingly, so I thought you girls would be glad. *Toujours perdis* is a lamentable fate. Josephine, I feel sure, will be grateful for a change of partners (er—humph!), whereas if a married woman is to dance with her husband only she might almost as well stay at home, according to Parisian tenets. Oh, Vivien! don't I deserve a vote of thanks!"

Vivien smiled faintly, and responded in a tremulous tone, that she began to feel as though her dancing days were almost over. "Oh! come, I say now!" Sir Archibald protested gallantly—which vague asseveration answered the purpose intended; for it sufficed, at any rate, to divert the conversation into less perilous channels.

For the expression of Vivien's white wan face effectually betrayed to one and all that they were drifting surely towards verbal quicksands, and that the next word or look or sentence might prove irretrievably fatal.

But just at this juncture Josephine entered, all smiles and excitement, and parcels and chatter; she had bought the cheapest gloves that ever were seen, and—"Vivien child! if only Worth does with your satin and lace half that he says, your toilette will be a marvel!" she protested, turning towards her sister.

Thus the danger was momentarily averted, and the looming rock ahead temporarily evaded. Mrs. Staunton drew breath more freely, for truth to tell, Sir Archie, in the excitement and rapture attendant upon maternal greetings with Josephine, had become happily oblivious of the threatened *contretemps*, and his curiosity even slumbered.

CHAPTER X.

TOWARDS seven o'clock the following evening, John Staunton and Sir Archie, strolling arm-in-arm down the Boulevard des Capucins, became to a full stop before one of those innumerable kiosks sacred to the sale of newspapers and cigarettes, with which the main thoroughfares of Paris are studded as lavishly as Regent-street with lamp-posts.

The ladies had been more or less invisible to the naked eye (as the baronet protested with a genuine sense of grievance) ever since the mid-day meal. And no wonder, for the notion of the ball had been so hastily proposed and carried that there was a variety of minor toilette details requiring "personal supervision";—so Josie had candidly informed her exigent admirer at luncheon that she infinitely preferred his absence to his presence "on this occasion only," and would consequently feel obliged if he would "take himself and John out of the way" until precisely ten minutes before the hour at which the brougham was ordered to be in waiting before the doors of the Continental.

So the two men had been killing time all the afternoon as ingeniously and industriously as their individual "conditions" would permit; though, to confess the truth, both husband and lover were more than ordinary excited and perturbed, each man furtively regarding his watch from time to time with more of restless anticipation and impatience than either would perhaps have cared to admit or been in a position to explain.

"Look alive, Hope!" John exclaimed, suddenly, for the baronet was vacillating 'twixt the conflicting merits of *Figaro* and *Le Petit Journal pour Rire*, whilst his friend, turning his back upon the kiosk, was complacently smoking a cigarette, and absently regarding the ebb and flow of pedestrians up and down both sides of the brilliantly-lighted boulevard in one continuous stream. "There's that fellow Chambri on the opposite side of the way. Let's follow him up and overtake him. Sharp's the word! I want to—"

"Where, old man—where?"

"Ah, he's come to anchor—speaking to a man just outside the Café Americain, don't you see? White flower in his coat, and—Good Heavens, Archie! have you seen a ghost! For Heaven's sake, man alive, say quickly what's amiss!"

For the baronet had fiercely grasped John Staunton's arm, and for one long moment literally gasped for breath.

"What did you say his name was?" he questioned, hoarsely, gazing wildly up at John. "Where did you meet him? And who—who did you say presented him to you as—as my friend?"

"Chambri—Comte de Chambri! Surely you should know the name! He was calling upon my wife one day at the Continental, and she introduced him as— But, for pity's sake, man alive, tell me at once if there's anything wrong! I—I can't understand why you look so scared. I suppose there's nothing to fear—"

"The worst!" Hope answered, hoarsely, clutching the other's arm. "It would be cruel kindness to prevaricate. In such a crisis the truth surely must be best. At any rate, I—I could not justify to my own conscience concealment in a matter involving issues so momentous" (for even as he spoke there rose up before him, all too vivid, a remembrance of Vivien's white face of agonised entreaty when, upon mention of the Comte's name, he, Sir Archie, had shown symptoms of repudiating the supposition that de Chambri was his friend). "That man is—Don't you know who he is? Can't you instinctively divine it? Good Heavens, Staunton, that fellow is De Launay, the wretch who—who would have stolen your wife!"

For one moment the baronet was horror-stricken, noting the effect of his own words; for it seemed to him that the Herculean frame of the stalwart man beside him literally reeled, staggered, tottered; that John Staunton, livid to the very lips, must have utterly collapsed and

fallen, save for his own iron grasp of his friend's nerveless arm.

Then—"Oh! Heaven!" escaped him, in the voice of a man who articulates aloud in the throes of some awful dream; "I see it all now. Fooled! fooled! fooled! Heaven help me! I—I would sooner far have seen her in her grave!"

"Be calm. Listen, John!" Sir Archibald began in authoritative tones; "we must follow that scoundrel; run him to earth in his own lair! See! he is moving on! *Hist! v'la!*" he signalled to a passing coach, who drew his *façes* up at once alongside the curb.

But to his amazement, John rallied instantaneously, and rousing himself by a vigorous shake, forestalled his friend, by calmly pointing out the Comte to Jehu, and deliberately instructing that sagacious worthy to follow at a small's pace down the boulevard, keeping the marked man's "white buttocks" steadfastly in view. Then he tapped the baronet briskly upon the shoulder.

"Come, *mon ami!*" he said, briefly, and both men jumped inside.

But there was silence between them, absolute and unbroken, as the cab slowly wound its way in and out among the crowd of equipages dashing rapidly along the brilliantly lighted boulevard, and down the wide Avenue de l'Opéra ablaze with electric lamps. The baronet felt dimly conscious that such words of consolation, suggestion, or advice as he might have volunteered, would appear inopportune—nay, well-nigh impertinent, however well-intentioned—in the face of such hopeless anguish, such crushing woe, as the rigid, ghastly pallor of John's face, his breathless silence, and his motionless attitude, all too forcibly conveyed.

Yet the young baronet realised instinctively that this injured husband was man enough to face the situation. Ay, and master it alone, unaided, grappling with circumstances as should appear to him best, without seeking counsel or assistance from any other in so harrowing and unforeseen an emergency; so Sir Archibald held his peace, strangely awed by the silent dignity of John's demeanour, and breathless from excess of respectful sympathy with the man whose cup of bitterness seemed, indeed, full to overflowing.

Before the brilliantly illuminated doors of the great Hôtel Continental itself the cab came at length to a full stop. For the "Monsieur" the coach had been bidden to follow, had entered the courtyard and passed within.

For a breathing space both Englishmen stared blankly at one another; then by mute accord they simultaneously alighted, dismissed the cab, and, still in unbroken silence, turned in at the familiar portals.

"Who is that gentleman who has just entered—tall, pale, dark, and thin—with the white flower in his coat?" John questioned, calmly of the *concierge*, who touched his hat respectfully to "Messieurs the English."

"Monsieur le Comte de Chambri, sir," the man responded in obsequious tones.

"Does he often come here? Is he known to—"

"The Comte is located within, Monsieur—ha! ha! His rooms now that I remember, adjoin those of Monsieur's party, the family of the English pastor, Numero 93—Gallery 10, on the second *étage* along the grand corridor, and if—"

"Enough—enough!" John motioned him to silence with an authoritative air, and turned towards his friend.

"What—what shall you do?" Sir Archie questioned.

"Dress for the Embassy ball," was the stern response, in a voice of unnatural calm, though every nerve in John's body was quivering then—every vein swelled nigh to bursting; "and see this played out to the bitter end. What will you?—*mon ami!* Is not life at best a drama!—sometimes tragedy, sometimes farce—dreary enough, Heaven knows, any way! You—you will return in the course of an hour!"

"If I live!" was the fervent, laconic response, uttered in a low, choked voice, which somehow sounded well-nigh solemn as a vow.

Then Sir Archibald Hope wrung his friend's hand, and silently turned on his heel; whilst John Staunton smothered a sigh, which was almost a moan, and passed slowly on towards the familiar staircase conducting to his own rooms.

The electric lamps were blazing in the great courtyard; the fountains sang "drip, drip" as they splashed in a feathery stream of silver over the huge tropical ferns and plants ranged round the porphyry basin; great vases of flowers sent forth their sensuous fragrance upon the balmy evening air; and a thousand lights, flashing from the hotel windows, made the quadrangle brilliant as a mimic fairyland, through which John Staunton made his way like a clock-work figure wound up to a certain pitch—only clock-work figures know nothing of the unutterable woe which sometimes swells a strong man's heart to bursting, and racks a human brain to frenzy, madness, and despair.

CHAPTER XL

AFTER half-an-hour's serious and uninterrupted meditation, Sir Archibald Hope duly completed an elaborate toilette, and had himself conveyed, according to arrangement, to the Hotel Continental.

Mounting to Miss Prior's *salon*, he found Josephine already fully equipped for the coming fray, and John Staunton likewise in evening dress. Vivien, however, was enveloped in a white muslin *peignoir*, or morning wrapper, trimmed with dainty lace and floating knots of pale pink ribbons—a bewitching and becoming costume in its way, yet one which even Sir Archibald's obtuse masculine perceptions perceived at a glance to be designed for conquest in the boudoir rather than for the open warfare of the ball-room battlefield.

Josephine—radiantly beautiful in cream satin and pearls, as it seemed to the enamoured baronet—met him at the door with a crestfallen air; all her anticipations of enjoyment had been rudely overthrown; for Vivien, pleading indisposition, had suddenly declared her intention of remaining at home alone.

Sir Archie stared blankly at Vivian for one moment, then involuntarily turned eyes of mute interrogation towards John, who stood in his favourite attitude with his back to the stove diligently caressing his dark moustache.

"And you, John? I suppose, then, Josie and I must go alone?"

"On the contrary," was the imperturbably cool rejoinder, in John Staunton's sternest tones; "although I fear I shall find myself sadly *de trop*, it is my decided intention to inflict my society upon you. An Embassy ball in Paris is a sight one cannot see every day—moreover, as Vivien is not well she will doubtless prefer solitude."

"Yes—I shall go to bed presently. I would not hear of John's remaining at home!" the young wife protested, earnestly, catching her quivering lip between her teeth, and unconsciously clasping those white, nerveless hands, which lay folded on her knee. "My head is bad—that is all. I shall be well enough to-morrow."

And truly she looked white and wan enough to justify the plea she had entered of "incapacity, on the score of indisposition!"

Gazing into the lovely face, upon which anguish had wrought such cruel havoc, Sir Archibald hated himself for his own suspicions, and shot a mutely interceding glance in the direction of Vivien's stern and silent lord.

But John Staunton was calmly drawing on his gloves, smoothing every wrinkle out of the fingers with elaborate care.

His face just then, though not and white, was absolutely impassive, his equanimity apparently untroubled; yet, calm and imperturbable though he appeared, Sir Archie instinctively divined the hideous thought, the fell suspicion which was meanwhile gnawing at his heart-strings, with fangs as sharp as those wherewith the historic foe consumed the vitals of his heroic Spartan victim.

For had the baronet just then been compelled to give his own thoughts voice, he must have

confessed, to tell the truth, that he himself feared the worst.

Nothing, however, now remained to be done but to help Josephine on with her cloak, and wish Mrs. Staunton good-night.

An air of painful constraint hung oppressively over all, and each member of the party, by tacit consent, combined to cut short the inevitable *adieu*.

Josephine, not unnaturally, was full of solicitude on her sister's account, declaring that under the circumstances she herself would have preferred to stay at home; she should insist upon leaving early, she assured the gentlemen, despite Vivien's well-nigh frantic protest that she should be in bed and asleep in a very short time; and finally, snatching up her fan and bouquet with an air of chagrin, suffered Sir Archibald to lead her from the room, a very woe-begone expression clouding her usually placid face.

John, busy buttoning his lavender gloves, wished his wife a curt "good-night," without one additional word; only somewhat more stiffly than his wont, he inclined his head (as though he found it difficult to stoop), and lightly brushed her white brow with his moustache, when Vivien raised her face appealingly, in expectation, seemingly, of that cold, conventional ghost of a caress which was all John Staunton nowadays ever bestowed upon his wife.

"John!" she faltered, in a voice so hoarse and low that it scarcely rose above a whisper, "John!"

Arrested by that word, he turned upon the threshold where he stood, in the act of following the others.

"Well?" he questioned, coldly.

"John!"

The anguish in her voice was so unfeigned, the look in her lovely eyes so piteous, she herself in her white, hopeless, despairing beauty so pathetic and *seductive*, that the man who loved her better far than his own life—the man whose very soul was just then riven by the agony of jealousy and suspicion—was powerless to resist that faint appeal.

John returned to her side, mesmerically impelled, it seemed, and stood mute and breathless gazing down upon her, his very lips just then blanched to the hue of the neckcloth he wore, his heart beating so heavily it seemed to shake his entire frame.

"Well?" he questioned, hoarse and stern.

"John!" she rose up then (her supple limbs quivering beneath her slender weight like reeds in the wintry blast), and wound her cold, trembling hands about his rigid arm, "John! you are not—angry with me!" she faltered, choking back a tearless sob.

One moment only he gazed down into her limpid, upturned eyes, then he glanced aside; he dared not trust himself to look upon her, so fair, so winsome, and so false! His heart gave one great lunge. Ah! false and treacherous though she might be, was she not dearer far to him in her sinful loveliness than all the spotless, virtuous women of whom the world might boast? Yet he must have a care lest he should be utterly unmasked.

"No, I am not angry with you, Vivien!" he answered, coldly (yet, was there not a suspicion of a tremor in his voice?) "I wish you your headache better; and, good-night—good-night!"

"Ah! John! if—if you did but know," she gasped, or tried to gasp, for in truth she never knew whether the words she sought to frame were audible to his ear, for already he was gone, releasing himself, almost roughly it seemed to her, and passing swiftly through the open door without one backward glance.

"Oh! Heaven!" she moaned, "Oh! Heaven!" then she sank down upon her knees from sheer incapacity to stand, perhaps, and buried her snow-white, tear-stained face among the cushions of the couch.

It was insupportable, unendurable, this carking anguish and despair which were settling down upon her like a cruel frost, chilling her very heart's blood, paralyzing thought and action, numbing her energies, and rapidly reducing her to the level of an inanimate machine. For she

was becoming stupefied by terror, and a suspense more painful to endure than the worst actual evil she could picture—anything, everything else would surely be far easier to bear.

For years past but little confidence had existed between herself and Josephine, so Vivien had thus far lacked heart to cloud her sister's new-born happiness, by inflicting upon her a confession of Gaston De Laurnay's visit and intimidation, and the miserable duplicity of which she had subsequently been guilty in presenting him to her husband as the Comte de Chambré, "a friend of Sir Archibald Hope's!"

Already Vivien bitterly regretted that she had not nerved herself a few hours earlier to confess all and bear the worst; for in how brief a while now must the truth transpire, when she literally dared not attempt to picture the inevitable result!

Josephine, in all probability, would betray Gaston's real identity to John, in the first moment of *rencontre*; then—then what would he, could he think of the treacherous part his guilty wife had played but a few days earlier? What construction could he place upon the duplicity she had been so reluctantly induced to practise?

Ah! but in any case surely he must at once absolve her from having wantonly displeased and disappointed him to-night. He would understand how impossible it would have been for her to go forth with him to the Embassy ball there to encounter the count.

There was consolation in this reflection, albeit meagre—surely some kindly instinct would whisper John (confronted with the truth) that she had essayed to act for the best—that she had not wilfully deceived and disappointed him!

And after to-night there must end and should come an end in any case to this awful and unnaturally strained state of existence; she would confess all—yes, all to John, and then he must decide at once and for ever whether he could extend to her genuine and entire forgiveness of the past, or whether he would prefer to banish her from his presence for ever.

Surely this last fate, however arid, chill, and drear, would constitute bliss, perfect and unalloyed, compared to the bitter, ceaseless anguish of spirit she had for long months past endured!

Ay, an end must come to this miserable tragedy, in which she suddenly realised her own utter inability longer to sustain her own ignoble part.

John might spurn, revile, repudiate her—as it seemed, indeed, all too likely that he would—she would bear her sentence uncomplainingly, and submit without a murmur to ignominious expulsion from his home, seeking to expiate in solitude the crime which had wrecked her life; but to continue to support existence under its present auspices was a task altogether beyond her strength, one under whose hopeless burden her heart had suddenly turned sick and cold and faint.

Within a few brief hours now at furthest the drop-scene of her old past miserable life must fall; to-morrow she must rise up to fight a short fierce battle, and then to begin the world anew!

To-morrow! but meanwhile, what of to-night?

Vivien shuddered; she dared not give rein to her imagination, nor permit herself to follow in fancy events which must perforce transpire within the course of the next few hours but a few hundred yards from the door of her own hotel.

Oh, Heaven! would this night never wear away! Would to-morrow—a gladder, brighter day, perchance—ever dawn for her!

Meanwhile Sir Archibald's brougham and pair was dashing along the crowded thoroughfares at a pace which foreign Jesus significantly stigmatised as "marvellous!" and "English quick!"

The trio within were strangely silent, considering the occasion and the gay scene for which they were bound.

The lovers exchanged a brief remark from

time to time; but John Staunton never spoke—and the baronet's heart, to confess the truth, was scarcely less heavy than his friend's.

"We might be funeral guests!" Josephine cried impatiently as the carriage came to a full stop, and Sir Archibald jumped out and assisted her to alight. "I can't think what ails us all to-night. Poor Vivien's headache has proved infectious. I myself feel more inclined for bed than ball! John, what are you so grave about? Remember you're here to make one of the festive throng—not to play the part of a mute at a funeral feast."

"Yet, as my last lingering hope died but an hour ago," John muttered, in so low a tone that it escaped Josie's ear, as upon Sir Archibald's arm she preceded her brother-in-law up the wide staircase, "why should I dissuade to appear as chief mourner? The whole wide world henceforth for me is but the grave of my lost happiness!"

"De Laurnay is not here yet, I fancy," the baronet whispered, significantly, some quarter of an hour later, when our trio had made the tour of the magnificent suite of rooms. "What do you intend to do, John?"

"Await his arrival," was the laconic response, in a voice which made even Sir Archibald's bold heart momentarily quake, as he thought with a pang of compassion of the absent and unconscious comee. "He must needs put in an appearance—however brief—if only for decency's sake."

The baronet argued differently. From his knowledge of De Laurnay he deemed it highly probable he would not waste one of the precious seconds of his appointed rendezvous with Vivien, out of mere regard for appearances.

It was even possible that his application for a ticket had only been part of a fatally well-contrived ruse calculated to lull suspicion, if any such should be aroused by Vivien's premeditated feint of indisposition.

Yet Sir Archibald held his peace. For there was that in the expression of John's eyes to-night which made his friend reflect that no matter at what cost to the young wife's reputation it were a thousandfold better she should clandestinely entertain Gaston De Laurnay in the *salon* of the *Hôtel Continental*, in the absence of her lord, than that the injured husband and guilty lover should suddenly find themselves face to face, here and thus, with that terrible vital secret ranking at each heart.

For that there would be blood shed, if not life split, the baronet did not doubt; so he held his peace, and let John "wait!" Waiting, he might grow calm.

But the Comte de Chambri had failed to appear, even when the great gilded clock over the grand staircase had proclaimed in solemn sepulchral tones that the hour was twelve.

Meanwhile, John Staunton was wandering restlessly round about the rooms with an expression in his dark eyes akin to that which gleams from the lurid pupils of a famished wolf, seeking whom he may devour.

But John Staunton's quest was vain. Gaston De Laurnay did not come.

CHAPTER XII.

SUDDENLY Vivien rose up shivering—how still it was, how lonesome! A nameless horror seemed creeping stealthily through her every vein.

It was but ten o'clock. The rector slept, and she was bound to remain here at her post until his valet should awaken him and summon her to administer the medicinal draught which he took each night about eleven from his younger daughter's hand. Then she would go at once to her own room—she would feel less nervous there.

The low windows opening out upon the balcony stood ajar, for the night was balmy as a midsummer eve. Vivien crossed the room and for a moment stood gazing out up at the star-spangled vault of heaven, then down into the brilliantly lighted court below.

Presently she shuddered; a horrible notion

had flashed across her mind. She glided swiftly towards the door; opening it she snatched the key from without, and quick as thought turned it in the lock inside, then drew a deep breath of relief, standing motionless one moment with both hands crossed upon her heaving breast.

She was safe for the time being now, at any rate; no one could seek to enter without striking a preliminary warning note; thus she would gain time for parley, time to summon self-control and self-possession—time (if the worst should come to the worst) to take refuge even in flight.

For that Gaston himself might seek to force an entrance was the horrible notion which had just presented itself to her mind. Finding her husband, Sir Archie and Josephine at the ball without her, was it not possible that he would withdraw after an hour or so, and—Ah! Heavens! what was that? A startled, smothered cry escaped her; she turned her head, her eyes grew wild, for the subject of her thoughts in *propria persona* and full evening dress, with the Legion of Honour at his button-hole, sprang in from the balcony lightly as a bird, drawing the window to behind him with a sharp decided "click clack."

With three strides he gained the door, snatched the key from the lock, transferred it to his waistcoat pocket, then crossed the room, and bowing low stood by Vivien's side.

"Coward!" she hissed, in a voice which terror rendered almost inaudible, "you saw my husband at the ball, so—"

"Pardon, madame. I watched Monsieur Staunton, your sister and Sir Archibald leave the hotel together without you, so I spared myself the unnecessary exertion of attending at the Embassy to-night! All I seek is here! What I desire I have already found. Oh, Vivien! do not turn away from me! Have pity! See—see me brought thus low, kneeling in the dust at your very feet, here upon the ground! Vivien, surely you will give me one kind word, a glance, a sign—some token that you are not—"

"The despicable thing you dare to think me!" she retorted, passionately, turning swiftly upon him then, her eyes ablaze, albeit her face was white as death. "Oh, Gaston! you surely do not need me to tell you that if a suspicion of this should reach my husband's ears we are—assuredly we both are lost! Why—why then—"

"It shall not reach him until we are safe beyond all danger of vengeance or pursuit!" he answered, tenderly, springing to his feet, and seeking to wind his arm about her where she stood. "I am here to rescue you, my darling—here to bear you away a second time from a life you loathe—to carry you off from the man you hate, in the strong arms of him whom you love! Fly with me—now, to-night, and I swear to you, Vivien—"

"How dare you, coward!" she hissed, in a voice which passion rendered so low and indistinct that Gaston for a moment was doubtful as to her meaning. "I am alone, unprotected, and no you—you come to terrify and—"

"I terrify you, Vivien!" he echoed, blankly. "Since when have I inspired terror! Terror and love walk not hand in hand! You were not wont to be alarmed when we sat side by side beneath the elms at Westlands during the long summer afternoons; you—"

"Spare me all such allusions!" she fairly moaned, covering her face with both her hands, as though to shut out the picture his words had all too vividly conjured up. "I am a broken-hearted woman; crushed, humiliated, degraded in my own sight, not less than in the eyes of others by the mere recollection (which nothing—nothing in the whole wide world has power to wipe out) of—of a base premeditated crime! Then—"

"Crime! You will not expect me to echo that word, Vivien! Crime is—"

"Loatheable—despicable—fatal! Fatal to happiness on earth—fatal to tranquillity or peace hereafter. Sin is its own avenger, for the heart is doomed to expiate—"

"Since when have you turned preacher?" he interrupted, with a sneer. "You make a pretty saint, *ma belle*; but, to my mind, you played far better the rôle of fascinating sinner. I—"

"Neither saint nor sinner," she interrupted, bowing her head on her hands. "A penitent, contrite woman you see before you now, monsieur. I am that, neither more nor less—a woman seeking to expiate! A woman striving, struggling—ah, so desperately! Respect my efforts, Gaston; and do me the only favour within your power now! Go—I beseech you go!"

"Go!" he echoed, fiercely, wildly. "Are you dreaming, Vivien? Go I will, but not alone! It is to claim the fulfilment of your promise—the reward of my fidelity, that I am here—at risk, at peril of my life. It is to rescue the prize snatched from my grasp—"

"Gaston, you are mad!" she cried, incautiously, casting prudence to the winds in the excess of impatient despair. "Unless you go at once, and promise—swear that you will never more return—I—I warn you that I—I shall have no resource but to tell my husband all before I sleep to-night, and to beg him to carry me far away. I care not whither, so only that—that I am secure from the danger of—of your ever more crossing my path! It is killing me, this—this shameless secret, this terrible suspense, this dread that, directly John is absent, you—"

"*Et moi donc!*" he interrupted, fiercely, seising her roughly by the arm. "What sort of life do you think is mine?—the life you have condemned me to! You have married my peace, you have wrecked my hopes, you have made me willing to sacrifice all, for the mere sound of your voice, the sight of your face, one touch of your little hand, one glance of your cold, cruel eyes; and yet you calmly bid me 'go!' Madame, you have still apparently to learn that a man's heart is not a ball, designed merely as a plaything for a woman's foot! You promised to renounce all in order to share my life! I hold you to your word; I—"

Both started, turned, and stood one moment mute, for to the ears of both it seemed a hand without was laid just then upon the handle of the door.

"I—I will cry for help!" Vivien murmured, faintly, clasping appealing hands. "It is Armand, or my father's servant come to summon me! Oh Gaston!"

"The intruder has gone his way and left you to your fate," the Comte returned, with a shrug of his shoulders, and an implacable air. "Some passing *garçon*, probably, who has shown discretion by withdrawing quietly. Hark! do you not hear the sound of retreating footsteps! for no matter what his errand, madame, I should have had no choice but to deny his admission here. You are at my mercy, Vivien—you shiver! Since when have you learnt to recoil from my touch—to shun my gaze—to cower and shudder at the sound of the voice of the man you love—to—"

"Hold!" she interrupted, wildly; "I do not love you Gaston de Laurnay! Surely you do not need me to tell you twice that—"

"You do not love me, Vivien! Did you then swear falsely in those summer days just dead, when—"

"Ah! I never loved you, Gaston, though, indeed—indeed I did not wantonly deceive you! In those days—as I have since discovered to my cost—I was ignorant as a child, and all unversed in the secrets of my own unawakened heart!"

"Yet even then, you remember, Vivien, you had been for two long years a wife! You knew enough to tremble, shudder, and recoil at the mere notion of setting forth to join your husband—enough to implore me to save and shield you from him when the news arrived of his return, and you dreaded to meet him face to face!"

"True—true!" she moaned, abjectly, covering her face with both her hands, and cowering like a guilty, broken-hearted creature; "I feared to encounter John, yet that does not prove that I loved you!"

"Does it not? You would have me, then, conclude that you were only coquetting with me! and having beguiled the tedium of existence during your husband's absence at my expense, you naturally turned to me in the hour of—"

"No, no—ten thousand times! I was not so base, so utterly culpable as you think. You have been wronged, deceived, and cruelly ill-used by me, but not—I swear it solemnly, here upon my knees at your very feet" (and, indeed, she dropped to earth, clasping her hands despairingly even as she spoke)—"not from motives so base and despicable as those you ascribe to the guilty woman, the treacherous wife, who is in truth deserving of the righteous scorn of all humanity!"

"Spare me melodrama, madame!" he retorted, bitterly, seizing her by the arm and forcing her to her feet; "what was the sentiment—if I may make bold to ask—you entertained towards me then, when you permitted me, at any rate, to talk to you of love?"

"I know not! Ah, in truth I know not; I myself, mistook, perhaps. I—I was all unversed then in—"

"Then, then!" he echoed fiercely, "you would have me understand, then, that since we parted six months ago that slumbering heart of yours has awakened, the latent spark has ignited at last; someone has finally succeeded in putting a match to the tow! Would it be presumptuous of me to inquire the name of my happier rival, madame?—the hero whose efforts have been crowned with success where I ignominiously failed!"

"Yes, yes! you have indeed the right to ask, and to know the truth; and if, indeed, there is aught of satisfaction to be gleaned from the pitiful facts these I will lay before you, monsieur, only praying you will show me all the leniency in your power, and then leave me at once and for ever."

She sank upon a low seat as she spoke, pressing her handkerchief one moment to her lips and eyes.

De Laurnay, meanwhile, leaning against a table opposite, regarded her fixedly, with a terrible expression upon his face, baffled passion and rage suppressed contorting his livid features, and making him look haggard, aged and worn, as a man of twice his years.

"When I married John I—I did not love him! Afterwards I—I grew jealous of his regard for Josephine—Josephine whom I have since learnt to venerate almost as a saint!"

"Then, when John left me, I—I wearied of life itself and felt myself ill-used! I welcomed you as a distraction, monsieur, and grew to regard your visits as bright spots in the dreary desert of existence."

"When John ultimately wrote to me to join him, it was—I was, perhaps, because I dreaded to say good-bye to you, that I—I decided to remain!"

Her voice here sank to a mere whisper, and then a pause ensued, the while she rocked herself slowly backwards and forwards in a paroxysm of shame and despair.

"Proceed, madame!" issued sternly from De Laurnay's bloodless lips, and the words were well-nigh imperious as a command.

"Well, you know as well as I what culpable folly ensued! Then, when news of John's return reached me unexpectedly—guilty, degraded woman as I was—I naturally shrank from meeting one so honest, so truthful, yet, alas! so relentless as the husband I had wronged."

"So I turned to you in my miserable anguish and despair! I—I believed I loved you then, Gaston. I solemnly protest I did not wilfully deceive either you or myself. It was not until—until long after that—I learned to understand the truth."

"You did love me, Vivien, you did—you do! By Heaven, I swear you do! And now—"

"Listen!"

It was now her turn to wax imperious, and, with an almost regal air of calm authority she raised one snow-white unfaltering hand.

"You know the ruse by which Sir Archibald rescued me from lifelong shame; but you do not know how—the husband I had outraged acted towards me from the very moment that he

bore me almost lifeless back to the home I had forfeited all right to enter, much less to share. And I"—she broke off suddenly, starting once more to her feet—"I lack strength or courage to dwell on details. I care only to be brief! I had saved my honour, but lost—his love."

"Since that hour down to the present moment he has been husband of mine only in name; he has considerably spared me the infliction of his society, he has generously foreborne to harass me with attentions or—or caresses which he felt would be unwelcome; whilst I—I have learnt daily, hourly to—love him—my lord and master—as—as surely mortal man was never loved before!"

"So must I love him to the end, Gaston; and he—he has nothing but proud indifference, cold, stern contempt to mete out in return to one so utterly unworthy as the wretched woman who bears his name."

"Thus my sin has proved my punishment; and, sometimes, it seems to me I shall go mad when I reflect that I am henceforth doomed to hopeless, life-long expiation and—"

"Nay—say rather that, having already expiated, through sorrow and suffering, sweet wife, you are thrice purified and holier far than those who have never sinned; precious—irreplaceably precious—moreover, in the sight of him who has vainly striven throughout long months past to oust you from his heart!"

"Come back, my love—come back to the safe haven of my arms! Death alone shall part us twain, whom Heaven has reunited; and, henceforth, welcome even sorrow, for shall we not meet it, bear it—ay, and defeat it, with Heaven's help, together!"

Both De Laurnay and Vivien had simultaneously started and stared aghast when the opening words of this sentence had fallen in a low voice, passion shaken, upon their astonished ears.

To them it seemed that each was the victim of some incomprehensible hallucination, for those low, unexpected tones had all the awe-inspiring solemnity of a voice from beyond the tomb; but as by mute accord they turned, it was to behold John Staunton himself in the flesh, framed like some gaunt spectre—still and motionless—between the fluttering lace curtains which draped the farther window opening upon the balcony—a window which, unperceived by either, had been left ajar, John, quivering from head to foot—strong man though he was—like an aspen leaf in the summer gale.

John, with humid eyes riveted upon his wife—eyes filled to overflowing with reverential love and longing, wistful tenderness and yearning—an indefinable expression, which Gaston De Laurnay at his dying day never might forget.

"John!" escaped Vivien's dry, trembling lips. That was all; then she stood still (with parted lips and wide, distended eyes, both hands clasped above that poor, wildly-beating heart of hers, which swelled just then nigh to bursting), rooted, seemingly, by an amazement too deep for the relief of words to the spot whereon she stood.

"Listen, wife!" he continued, in the same strange far-off voice—a voice such as might emanate from a phantom figure or a man speaking in a dream—"before you come back to my arms for ever listen to my confession, even as I, unjustifiably, perhaps have overheard your own. For I too am guilty, I too have sinned."

"It may be that your sweet lips shall decree I too must expiate! Before I left you here to-night I had learned your secret, knew that this gentleman here, the Comte de Chambri and Gaston De Laurnay were one, identical, and the same."

"When you feigned indisposition—to escape the *rencontre* as I now believe—I suspected, nay, would have sworn, you had skilfully manoeuvred to be left alone in order to grant Monsieur le Comte a rendezvous."

"Finding him absent from the ball, I returned to confront you both together, found the door locked, and heard the very voices I had anticipated in earnest converse within this room, forced open monsieur's door (adjoining) to find his apartment deserted, slipped round by the balcony, had, unsuspected, at the open window

heard sufficient of your dialogue to—to prove to me that I—I had basely and unjustly suspected the woman I so passionately loved, and that I—I am in truth at this very moment, the happiest man upon earth! Vivien, I need not add that I have loved you unvaryingly and ever, as I love you now, as I must love you to the end. Vivien, will you come!"

As his voice died away in a tremulous whisper John extended wide his arms; still he did not advance a single step; then with a wild, frenzied cry she sprang towards him, and as an inarticulate rapturous murmur escaped his lips, John Staunton folded his wife to his heart, and bowed his head upon her own.

De Laurnay stood one breathless, agonised moment, like a man physically paralysed.

"Sir!" he began, hoarsely, fiercely; then he paused, for John, winding one arm about his wife, advanced towards his rival, holding out his strong right hand.

"Monsieur, this moment is too full for me of perfect joy to permit of earthly alloy. There is my hand; good-night, good-bye! I would fain be left alone for awhile with my little wife; but first from the bottom of my heart I—I venture to wish you God-speed!"

"You have been wronged; you have suffered grievously, and I—I cannot wonder that—that you loved her as you did! I think it would have been easier to hate you if—if you had loved her less. Fair and resistless as she is, I understand too well at once your temptation and your excuse. Forgive her and forgive me—in that I am happier than yourself!"

"To have loved Vivien, and to have lost her is a sufficient punishment, it seems to me, for any earthly crime. I have endured its throes myself, and—poitron! though you may deem me—by Heaven, sir, I can think no more of vengeance at a moment so full for me of bliss. For you, moreover, I feel ought save deep commiseration. You won't refuse my hand, monsieur! Say good-bye and let us part!"

One moment only De Laurnay hesitated, gazing strangely, fixedly at Staunton; then his glance wandered towards Vivien's face and rested there, undergoing the while a singular metamorphosis.

"I—I could not take your life," he muttered, hoarsely, "without destroying all chance of happiness for her! Make her happy, 'tis all I ask of you! I loved her well, believe me—as well, perhaps (though assuredly less nobly) as yourself; but the odds were terribly against me! Fate, from the first, was on your side!"

"And right and honour!" John supplemented, softly. "Yes, you were heavily handicapped, monsieur. Let us forget the past!"

"Forget—never! Forgive—yes! She loves you, moreover; and so for me there remains nothing but to withdraw! May you be happy—both! What matter that for me the sun of life has set!"

Then he wrung John's hand, though with obvious effort; and with one wistful, farewell glance at Vivien passed through the open window out into the silent, starlit night.

Making their way, arm-in-arm, up the broad staircase a full hour later, Josephine and Sir Archibald almost stumbled up against the Comte de Chambri, who was descending hastily, wrapped in his travelling cloak.

"Monsieur De Laurnay!" cried Josephine, aghast. "Where—where have you come from! Where are you going to!" she questioned, incoherently.

One moment, then he paused, and both noticed how ghastly were his features, how agonised the expression of his face.

"Mademoiselle," he answered, strangely, "I came from the gates of Paradise! Standing, shivering without, I was privileged to gaze within—at those happier, surely, than the angels, steeped to the lips in mortal bliss! I go whither those go upon whom the porphyry gates are closed for ever. Farewell—farewell!"

Entering the great *salon* a few moments later, the lovers found a pair of rivals already in the field—Vivien seated upon John's knee, with her

white arms locked about his neck—her fair, flushed, tear-stained face buried upon her husband's breast.

The frail barque which had so nearly foundered had reached its true haven at last. Safely anchored in John's strong arms, Vivien already feels that for her life's storms and perils are well-nigh past. She can, at any rate, defy the breakers, and regard such clouds (as must perforce scud from time to time across the heaven of all human happiness) with the unshrinking, fearless gaze of one at rest—in port!

What need to add that when Josephine and Sir Archibald learned the whole truth before the happy party separated for the night their unselfish joy was scarcely less than that of the reunited couple, for whose sakes both the baronet and Miss Prior had endured so much?

[THE END.]

LILIES OF-THE-VALLEY.

—102—

EDWARD PERLEY, Esq.—he was a lawyer lately admitted to the bar—was poor, but he was talented, ambitious, and had expectations from his Uncle Edward, a crusty old bachelor, who was very rich, and had defrayed the expenses of young Edward's education.

There was no formal understanding between the two men regarding money-matters, but the young lawyer was the old bachelor's nearest relative, and he believed in a vague way that some day in the far future he would fall heir to his uncle's fortune.

This belief, however, did not in any way retard or dwarf his struggles to do something for himself.

He had great confidence in the elder man's knowledge of men and things, and asked his uncle's advice on all the more weighty matters that came under his consideration, being profited greatly thereby.

It is not strange, therefore, that when, after a very brief acquaintance, he fell hopelessly in love with pretty Mabel French, he should go to Uncle Edward with the confession of his passion.

Of course it was a florid and incoherent story that he poured into the old bachelor's ears, brightened by the enthusiasm of youth and burning with passion.

Uncle Edward listened in silence, and when the story was finished, shrugged his shoulders coldly.

"So you are in love, eh? Well, I might have expected it. Few men at your age have any sense, and the sight of a pretty face drives them crazy."

"But, uncle—" began the young lawyer, with a chill at his heart, occasioned by the elder man's words.

"It is truth," persisted the old bachelor. "I went through just such an experience myself. When I was your age I was as madly in love as you think you are, and made as big a fool of myself."

"You, Uncle Edward?"

"Yes, and when I learned that the woman I thought an angel was a cold and heartless coquette I was ready to do all sorts of desperate things for love of her; but I got over it, thank Heaven, and since then have been able to estimate women at their true worth."

"But Mabel is so tender-hearted and true and loving—"

"There, there!" interrupted the old bachelor, lifting his hand deprecatingly. "Spare me your rhapsodies. I know it is useless to argue the question, but before you take the fatal step I would like to see this paragon of all the virtues at whose feet you sigh, and roll your eyes and quote poetry, and do hundreds of other foolish things."

Edward crimsoned angrily at thus being made the butt of his uncle's caustic ridicule, but controlled himself with an effort, and made no reply.

Uncle Edward noticed the flushed face, and laid his hand tenderly on the young man's shoulder.

"There, there, my boy!" he said. "You mustn't get angry at what I say. I'll admit that there are some exceptional women who make true and loving wives. Your mother was one of them, and she made your father a happy man, despite his poverty. I loved and respected her, and many times envied my brother his happiness. My only regret is that both of them did not live to enjoy the wealth that came to me later in life, and which I would freely have shared with them."

At this tender mention of his father and mother, whom he could just remember, Edward's face brightened.

"You have been a good uncle to me," he said.

"I have tried to be. But we are drifting from the subject. Where does your lady-love live?"

"On Pleasant Avenue, with her widowed mother. Mrs. French is quite wealthy, and they live in fine style."

"If this girl suits me," said Uncle Edward, taking up his hat, "I'll set you up in an establishment the equal of the one she leaves. Get your hat, my boy, and we'll pay them a visit."

The two men walked to the house together, arm in arm.

Mabel was in her boudoir, but she sent word by the servant who admitted them that she would be down presently.

And pending her arrival Edward suggested their taking a turn through the conservatory, which was very large, and filled up with the rarest and choicest plants.

Uncle Edward was a great admirer of flowers, but when in the course of their walk they reached the lower end of the building, and came upon a bewildering display of lilies-of-the-valley, which filled the air with their fragrance, his florid face suddenly turned pale, and gasping for breath, he sank down upon a rustic bench, and a shiver of horror convulsed him.

"Uncle—dear uncle!" cried Edward, springing to his side. "Are you ill?"

"No, no!" was the hoarsely-gasped answer. "It was nothing, only those flowers. The sight of them gave me a turn."

"The lilies-of-the-valley?" quivered Edward. "They are Mabel's mother's favourite flower. She is very proud of them."

"It is very foolish of me, I know," said Uncle Edward, rising to his feet; "but the sight of them carried me back thirty years, when I was as poor as you, but without your prospects, and just as madly in love with a woman who was utterly devoid of heart."

He led the way to the upper end of the conservatory, and seating himself near a little fountain motioned his nephew to a place beside him.

"I might as well tell you the story," he said, after a moment's silence. "It will explain my momentary weakness at sight of those flowers, and the reason why I never married."

"At the age of twenty-two I was junior clerk in a large importing house, was a general favourite with my employers, and soon hoped to be promoted to a higher position."

"Old Mr. Landell, the head of the firm, frequently invited me to his house, and on one occasion introduced me to his only daughter, Alice, who had just returned from school. She was a beautiful girl, and I fell madly in love with her."

"I received every encouragement at her hands, and her treatment of me was such that I was led to believe that my love was returned. I was poor, and she was rich, however, and I dared not risk a refusal of my suit by asking her hand in marriage."

"Suitors flocked to her side, and if she showed a man ordinary civility I was instantly consumed with jealousy. I spent hours formulating little speeches declaring my love, but whenever an opportunity to deliver them arrived my courage always forsook me and I left her, cursing my timidity."

"One night, just before a grand ball to be given in her honour, and to which I had been invited, a happy thought occurred to me, and seizing pen and paper, I wrote out the story of my love and asked her hand and heart. I don't remember exactly what was in the letter, but presume it was as foolish as epistles of that sort generally are."

"I went out with the letter in my pocket to hunt for a messenger who would take it to her, but in passing a florist's window, my eye was attracted by a magnificent bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley, and walking in, I purchased it."

"While the florist was putting up the bouquet for me, I opened my letter to Alice and added this line:

"If I dare hope, wear a spray of these lilies in your hair to-night."

"I rolled up the letter and thrust it deep down in the bouquet; then giving the florist directions where to send it, I paid for the flowers and walked out."

"Well, Alice wore no flowers that night, and I left her father's house cursing fate and hating all womankind. I resigned my position the next day and became a wanderer."

"During my self-imposed exile I heard that Alice had married, but when I returned, eighteen years ago, her father was dead, and I made no inquiries about her. I was poor then, but a year after my return an old aunt of mine died, leaving me her entire fortune in consideration of the fact that I took her name."

"That, then, sir," said Edward, "is why you are Edward Fessenden, and my father, your brother, was John Perley?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Fessenden, "I changed my name."

He did not notice his nephew's unusual excitement of manner as the young man rose, but remained gazing pensively at the rippling fountain, turning over in his mind the bitter memories of the past.

"If you will pardon me a moment, sir," said Edward, "I will go and hunt up Mabel. I think she has come down, and we will join you here."

"Do," said Mr. Fessenden, wearily.

And he dropped his head upon his hands.

He was still deep in reverie when his nephew returned, accompanied by two ladies; one young and blushing; the other older and more mature, whose face was flushed and whose eyes sparkled with a new and feverish excitement.

"Uncle!" said the young man.

Mr. Fessenden raised his head.

His eyes fell upon the face of the elder woman, and a smothered cry escaped him.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

"Oh, Edward," cried the woman, advancing toward him, and holding out her hands entreatingly, "do not turn from me, but now, after the lapse of many years, listen to my story! I did not know of your love for me until months after you left, when the bouquet you sent me, and which I religiously kept, was withered and faded. When it began to drop apart, I found the note, and used every effort to discover your whereabouts. I was unsuccessful. I married, still loving you, and now, after the lapse of thirty years, I still hold your memory dear, and lilies-of-the-valley are my favourite flower."

She held toward him a little box, in the bottom of which were some faded sprigs of white and green, and a note yellow with age.

"I have kept your flowers and note all these years," she said.

"Forgive me, Alice, for misjudging you!" cried Uncle Edward.

And, advancing, he took the happy woman in his arms.

An hour later he joined his nephew and Mabel, who had discreetly withdrawn to the house.

"Well, my boy," he said, leading forward Mrs. French, "this little woman has promised to marry me next month, and if you two can make up your minds to join your lives and fortunes at the same time, we'll have a jolly double wedding, and the church shall be carpeted with lilies-of-the-valley!"

FACETIÆ.

"YOUNG TIMBERWHEEL has a suit of clothes for every day in the week." "I never saw him wear but one." "Yes, that's the suit."

"ARE you a suitor for Miss Brown's hand?" "Yes, but I didn't." "Didn't what?" "Suit her."

"HELP! help!" cried the man who was being robbed. "Calm yourself," said the highwayman, "I don't need any assistance."

JOHNNIE (with his history book): "Papa, what was the Apian Way?" Papa: "I suppose it was a way Apian had, though I don't know much about him personally."

PROUD CYCLIST: "Yes; it took me about six weeks' hard work to learn to ride." Pedestrian: "And what have you got for your pains?" Proud Cyclist: "Arnica."

JOHNNY SMART: "There's a big difference between my teacher and a streak of lightning." Mrs. Smart: "How so?" Johnny Smart: "He strikes several times in the same place."

"ARE you very busy?" "No, sir. What can I do for you?" "I notice that the advertisement on the window says you have ten thousand overcoats for sale. Can I try them on?"

"How do you get on with your music, Amy?" Amy: "Oh! ever and ever so fast. I used to get behind my teacher when we played duets; but now I can get two or three bars ahead just as easy."

MISS OLDHAM: "Julia dear, I'm going to give such a novel birthday party. I've invited a guest for every year of my life. Won't it be just lovely?" Miss Rosetud: "Yes, dear; but where will you find room for them all?"

"Who is your favourite actor?" he inquired of his wife. "You are, dear," she answered. "I!" "Yes; when you come home late and try and make me believe that you have been sitting up with a sick friend."

MOTHER (looking into room): "What's Johnnie crying for?" Willie: "He's crying for my cake." "The little glutton! What did he do with the one I gave him?" "Oh, I ate his up first."

"If you had your choice, Willie, would you rather be as wise as Solomon, as great as Julius Cæsar, as rich as Croesus, as eloquent as Demosthenes, or as tall as Goliath?" "I'd rather be a drummer in a brass band."

"Doctor, I have an important physiological question to ask you. When I stand on my head the blood rushes into my head. Now, when I stand on my feet, why does it not rush into my feet?" "Because your feet are not hollow."

MARRIED MAN: "Yes, I'm afraid I shall have to enlarge my house soon. You see, my family is getting too numerous. I shall have to throw out a wing." Facetious Bachelor: "Why not throw out a baby?—It's cheaper."

"Aw, they say, don't ye know, that Cholty Caperway has brawn trouble." "Too bad, bah Jawsge. Why don't they do something?" "They can't locate it, ye know." "The brawn or the trouble?" "Bah Jove! don't ye know, I weally forgot to ask which."

He (just introduced): "What a very ugly man that gentleman near the piano is, Mrs. Hobson." She: "Why that is Mr. Hobson." He (equal to the occasion): "Oh, indeed! How true it is, Mrs. Hobson, that the ugly men always get the prettiest wives."

OLD MARGAROT (to little Billy Ducks, just left school, who applies for situation as office boy, and produces testimonial from clergyman): "We don't want you on Sundays, my good little boy. Have you a reference from anyone who knows you on week days?"

"I'm perfectly convinced," said the ambitious young man, "that I can write the greatest novel of the period." "Why don't you set to work and do it, then?" "Oh, I wouldn't think of such a thing. I am happy in my belief on the subject. Where's the good of my risking disappointment?"

If you do not believe there is an exception to every rule consult some lawyer who has lost his case.

MRS. BINKS: "My husband did not like that tea you sent us last." Grocer (politely): "Did you like it, madame?" Mrs. Binks: "Yes, I liked it." Grocer (to clerk): "James! Send Mrs. Binks another pound of the same tea she had last. Anything else, madame?"

"JENNIE," said little Mabel to her big sister at breakfast, "did you tell papa?" "Tell papa what?" asked Jennie. "Why, you told Mr. Buster last night if he did it again you'd tell papa—and he did it again. I saw him." And then papa looked at Jennie over his glasses.

BENEVOLENT LADY (who has with infinite trouble organised a country excursion for some overworked London dressmakers): "Then mind you're at the station at nine to-morrow, Eliza. I do hope it won't rain!" "Rine, Miss! I 'owp not, to be sure! The country's bad enough when it's foine, yn't it, miss?"

Mat with in the drawing-room the German professor is an entertaining old gentleman. To him, recently, a lady said, when one of his compositions had just been rendered by one of the guests, "How did you like the rendering of your song, professor?" "Vas dot my song?" replied the professor. "I did not know him."

MISS COYBELL: "Jack Softleigh told me last night that I ought to accept him because he was willing to prove his love for me." Her Friend: "What did you say?" "I said I couldn't see it in that light." "Then what did he say?" "Nothing. He just turned the light out."

STUDENT: "I learn that there are cases in which people have had from childhood an uncontrollable desire to eat soap. What is the cause of that?" Learned Professor: "They are victims of sapsomania." Student: "Um! What does sapsomania mean?" Learned Professor: "A desire to eat soap."

"I WISH to say to the congregation," said the minister, "that the pulpit is not responsible for the error of the printer on the tickets for the concert in the Sunday schoolroom. The concert is for the benefit of the arch fund, not the arch fiend. We will now sing hymn six, 'To err is human, to forgive divine.'"

CAPTAIN (to belated passenger who has suddenly appeared on the deck of the abandoned ship): "Jump, man! Jump, quick! Don't you see she's going down?" Passenger: "Is my wife saved?" Captain: "Yes." Passenger: "Well, good-bye. I can't spend the rest of my life explaining why I let her take this steamer."

JANIE had been very naughty at dinner, and for a punishment had been sent out of the room. When pudding was served mamma told the servant to tell the child that if she would behave she could return. After a few minutes the servant returned. "Well, Annie, what did Miss Janie say?" "Please, mum, she wants to know what pudding it is!"

FRIEND: "I say, Jack, why don't you marry, and settle down?" Jack: "Can't." "You have a good income?" "Yes." "And your aunt left you a charming house?" "Yes." "Then why don't you hunt up a wife?" "Oh, a wife is easy enough to get; that isn't the trouble." "Then what is the matter?" "I can't find a servant-girl."

A TRAMP was arrested, taken before an Australian justice, and sentenced to three months. His worship, in explaining the sentence, remarked that, while there was no evidence that the prisoner had been guilty of any crime, he thought it prudent to commit him, as he had the wild, haggard look of a man about to start a newspaper.

QUILLER wrote a very bad hand generally, but, writing hurriedly, making an appointment with a friend, he excelled even himself. He had left his letter for half an hour, and on going to address the envelope, he happened to glance at the epistle. Scarcely a word could he decipher, but, calmly enclosing it, he said to himself: "After all, what does it matter! It's Hawkins has to read it, not I."

A SCOTSMAN once neatly turned the tables on an Englishman who had been alluding to the number of Scots in London. "Well," replied the Scot, "I know a place in Scotland where there are thirty thousand Englishmen who never go back to their own country." "Why, wherever can such a crowd be?" said the Englishman, to whom the Scot dryly remarked, "At Bannockburn."

At seven o'clock in the morning two French duellists, who are to fight to the death at a place in the suburbs, meet at the ticket-office of the railway station. "Give me a return ticket, as usual," says the first duellist to the clerk, in a terrible tone, and with a ferocious twist of his moustache. "I—I say, do you always buy return tickets?" stammers his opponent. "Always." "Then I apologise."

It is related that a man was recently very angry because his wife, who had gone on a visit, would not shorten it, in spite of his appeals to her to come home. He finally hit upon a plan to induce her to return. He sent her a copy of each of the local newspapers with one paragraph cut out; and when she wrote to inquire what it was that he had extricated he refused to tell her. The scheme worked admirably. In less than a week she was at home to find out what had been going on that her husband wished to keep from her.

A POLICEMAN in a country village where "cases" were rare one day came across his landlord in an incapable state. The chance was too good to be missed, so the landlord was summoned and fined to the amount of 14s. 7d. The fine was paid, but the policeman's feelings can be better imagined than described when, on reaching home, he found his rent had been raised sixpence per week, and so it continued for twenty-nine weeks, when the landlord coolly informed him that "he had paid the fine, and could have his house at the former rent."

Those who are acquainted with the filthy state of the river Clyde will best appreciate the following dialogue: "Man, Donald, they tell me that's the finest salmon river in Scotland," said a worthy, who had hailed from Glasgow, and was on a visit to his friend in Perth. "It's a' that," replied Donald, as they both walked leisurely along the banks of the river Tay. "Weel, dæ ye ken, Donald! At the time I've been here I've never seen a single fish jump out the water; and in the Clyde, above the harbour, ye'll see them jumping out every mornin'." "Nae doot," answered Donald; "for I'm shuir they'll be glad tae get a mouthful o' fresh air."

A GLASGOW tradesman asked an English commercial traveller to go home with him one evening to taste a special whisky which he had purchased. The Englishman, knowing his friend was a judge of such things, readily agreed. "Foe-yan," followed "half-yan," and "half-yan" followed "just a wee drop more" till somewhere about a score of drinks had disappeared down each throat. The Englishman rising to bid his host good-night, found that he could scarcely maintain his equilibrium, so he asked his host to call a cab for him. When the cab was announced the host saw his friend to the door, and cautioned him thusly: "Noo gang carefully down the steps, and when ye git to the bottom ye'll see two cabs; tak' the first yan, the second's no' there."

HERE is a story of a countryman who attended the final between Aston Villa and West Bromwich Albion at the Crystal Palace. The teams were photographed, a proceeding by no means unusual. Among the crowd was a countryman who apparently had taken advantage of the cheap excursion more with a view of exploring the Palace than of witnessing the match. "Wot be they a-takin' their forty-graffs for, I wonder!" he exclaimed to his neighbour, a youth from Birmingham. The latter smiled at the ignorance of his questioner, and replied, with the air of one who knows what he is talking about: "That is a necessary precaution." "Oh, ay," said the countryman, as wise as ever. "You see," added the youth, "if they didn't take their photographs the committees would never be able to sort out their own men after a scrimmage."

SOCIETY.

THE Queen intends to confer the Order of the Garter upon the King of Portugal, who will be invested with the ribbon and other insignia by Her Majesty at Windsor Castle.

THE Queen wishes the Court to be comfortably settled at Windsor in time to make preparations for the celebration of the fifty-fifth birthday of the Empress Frederick, on Thursday, November 21st.

THE Queen will hold the next Council a few days after the return of the Queen to Windsor Castle, which is at present fixed for Saturday, November 16th. The new Privy Counsellors are then to be sworn in, and the Solicitor-General and several others will be knighted.

THE Duke and Duchess of Connaught are not going to Balmoral this season, the death of the Hereditary Grand Duchess of Oldenburg having changed all their plans; but they are to visit Her Majesty at Windsor this month, and will spend the Christmas holidays at Osborne with the Queen.

ONE of the latest princely converts to cycling is Prince Alphonse of Bavaria, who has taken up the craze with the utmost fervour, and seems quite disposed to temporarily give up his favourite exercise of driving tandem for the whirling wheel.

A LAW has been promulgated in Norway and Sweden by which a marriage cannot be legally effected without the production of a certificate asserting that both the bride and bridegroom bear the marks of a real and legitimate vaccination.

A PERAMBULATING cigar shop is the latest Berlin development of the world's new born love of wheels. A magnificent glass case is mounted on a sort of quadruplet, which receives motive power from the limbs of the proprietor, who is seated just behind the case. At night the whole affair is brilliantly lighted by electricity.

MONTHS and months must elapse before the Czar and Czarita can be crowned Emperor and Empress of All the Russia, and wear all that weighty gorgeousness which is getting ready for them. Her Imperial Majesty's train is naturally an interesting item, and the coat is put down as some £40,000, or thereabouts.

THE Queen's courier has been inspecting villas near Naples, in the hope of finding suitable accommodation for Her Majesty and suite during a contemplated visit to the Continent next spring. The King of Italy has offered to place Capo de Monti at Her Majesty's disposal, but the offer has been courteously declined, for reasons of State.

THE Princess Feodora of Saxo-Meiningen is Her Majesty's first great-grandchild, and may confer upon her illustrious forbear the dignity of great-great-grandmotherhood within a year or two. She is a pretty girl with great musical abilities, and as it is probable that she will be betrothed next year our Queen may yet see a fourth generation of her descendants.

THE Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Serge and the Grand Duke Paul changed all their plans, in compliance with a request from Tzarke-Zelo, and have returned direct to St. Petersburg from Darmstadt, where they suddenly proceeded from Paris. They abandoned both their visit to England and their intended stay of two or three weeks in Paris. The Grand Duke Serge has great influence over his nephew and brother-in-law the Czar, while the Empress delights in the society of her sister, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth.

SOCIETIES for the Higher Culture of Women are not only growing daily more numerous in St. Petersburg, but they are rapidly spreading throughout Russia, and the importance of the movement can hardly be over-estimated. The sudden impetus is due to the influence of the young Empress, who is known to have the welfare of her female subjects at heart. It is her conviction that most, if not all, of the great reforms which have taken place in the world have been brought about mostly by women's opinions and persuasions.

STATISTICS.

THE Princesses of our Royal Family have, on the average, married at the age of 22, the Princes at 28.

SUNDAYS and fixed holidays excepted, it is estimated that £20,000 worth of fish are daily dragged out of the sea by British fishermen.

OF every man and woman living to-day at the age of twenty-five one out of two will live, according to the tables, to be sixty-five years of age.

THE report of the directors of the Manchester Ship Canal, for the half-year ended June 30th last, states that the receipts amounted to £63,036, and the expenditure to £56,008, leaving a balance of £7,028.

THE Russians, in modern times, have had only two younger Czsars than Nicholas II. These were Peter II., who succeeded in 1717, at the age of 12; and Alexander I., who succeeded in 1801, at the age of 24. The three late Czsars, Nicholas I., Alexander II., and Alexander III., succeeded respectively at the ages of 20, 37, and 36.

GEMS.

MINUTES are like gold dust, which is never so fine that it cannot be used, or that it loses any of its value.

TRUTH and falsehood enter us by the same gate, hold the same place and credit, and maintain themselves by the same means.

IT is singular and yet a fact that the virtues we are most loth to believe possessed by others are those we are incapable of ourselves.

THE greatest obstacle to being heroic is the doubt whether one may not be going to prove one's self a fool. The truest heroism is to resist the doubt; and the profoundest wisdom to know when it ought to be resisted and when to be obeyed.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PICKLETT.—Slice green tomatoes, sprinkle with salt and let remain over night. To eight pounds of tomatoes add two large onions, one bell pepper, one cupful of brown sugar. Season with one teaspoonful each of mustard seed and cinnamon, cover with vinegar, and cook until tender.

MINT SHERBET.—Put one pound of sugar and one quart of water on to boil. Boil five minutes. Pound the leaves from a good-sized bunch; add them to the boiling syrup, and when cool, strain. Add juice of two lemons, and sufficient green colouring to make a delicate green. Freeze.

VANILLA CARAMELS.—One tablespoonful of butter, one cupful of brown sugar, half a cup of milk, and a teaspoonful of vanilla sugar. Boil carefully until when you drop the mixture into ice water it will harden, but is not brittle. Turn into a greased dish, and just before the mixture is entirely cold cut it into blocks.

FROZEN PUDDING.—Separate six eggs. Put over the fire one pound of sugar and one pint of water; stir until the sugar is dissolved; bring to boiling point and boil five minutes from the time it begins to boil. Beat the yolks of the eggs until creamed; stir them into the boiling syrup. Take from the fire and beat until cold; add a pint of cream, a tablespoonful of vanilla, put into the freezer and freeze.

STUFFED PEACHES.—Pare six peaches, cut them into halves and remove the stones. Chop six fine English walnuts and six almonds. Fill the cavities from which the stones were taken with the chopped nuts. Fasten them together with a little wooden skewer, stand the peaches in a saucepan, sprinkle four tablespoonfuls of sugar over them. Cover the saucepan and allow them to stand where they will steam for about ten minutes. Lift carefully and serve with cold cream.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE raven is the only bird found native in every country in the world.

THE best paid governess in the world seems to be the English governess of the little King of Spain. This lady receives £900 per annum.

IN Burmah it is the woman who does the wooing. Not only does she select her own husband, but when she tires of him she procures a divorce for the asking of it, and marries anew.

THE Russians have discovered a big underground city in Turkestan, near the Bokharan town of Karki. Exploration of some big caves revealed the fact that they led to a city in the dark, built thousands of years ago.

AN ice locomotive was some years ago constructed for use in Russia. It is employed to haul freight between St. Petersburg and Cronstadt. The front part rests on a sledge, and the driving wheels are studded with spikes.

IN Syria, near Damascus, there is said to grow a humming-bird plant, the flower of which bears a close resemblance to a humming-bird. The breast is red, the wings are a dark green, the back yellow, the head and tail a bluish black.

ARABIAN WOMEN who have to go into mourning stain their hands and feet with indigo for eight days, and during that time they will drink no milk, on the ground that its white hue does not harmonise with the mental gloom.

THE following is the daily ration of the animals at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris: Ten pounds of flesh for each lion, tiger, and bear; seven pounds for the panther, three pounds to six pounds for the hyena, one pound for the wild cat, and two pounds for the eagle.

IT is safe to say that a basketful of finger-rings are lost at the seashore every season. Many bathers never think to remove their rings from their fingers before taking a plunge in the surf, and when they come out not a few find that the rings have slipped off in the water.

THE leaves and stems of the "burning tree" of India are covered with stinging hairs after the manner of the common nettle, but of a far more virulent nature. When touched, the sensation felt is as of being burnt with red-hot iron, the pain extending over other parts of the body, and lasting several days.

CHICAGO has a bird hospital, the only one of its kind, it is said, in the world, where sick and wounded birds are received and cared for. Such an institution ought to be a great success in this country, for thousands of valuable pets are lost through their owners being unable to treat them when ill.

THE custom of wearing long finger-nails is general among the aristocracy of parts of China and Siam. The disfigurement is supposed to add to the importance of the individual as it is evident that the wearer cannot do any work, and must therefore be a person of leisure, with a fortune proportionate to the length of his nails.

THE wearing of hats in Parliament by the members is explained back to the time when those who were summoned to legislate, or rather to authorise the King to make levies, came in wearing helmets, which were not easily removed. It is another illustration of the fact that things are now as they used to be, and as they will be.

STRAW is put to strange uses in Japan. Most of the horses are shod with straw. Even the clumsiest of cart-horses wear straw shoes. In their case the shoes are tied round the ankles with straw rope, and are made of the ordinary rice straw, braided so that they form a sole for the foot about half-an-inch thick. These soles cost about a halfpenny per pair, and when they are worn out they are thrown away. Each cart has a stock of fresh new shoes tied to the horse or to the front of the cart, and in Japan it was formerly the custom to measure distance largely by the number of horse-shoes it took to cover the distance. So many horse-shoes made a day's journey, and the average shoe lasted for about eight miles of travel.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MOONIE.—On the left hand side.

HAL.—Consult a regular physician.

F. G.—We do not give medical advice.

QUERIST.—It is a matter of no importance.

MED.—Wash the dog with carbolic soap occasionally.

S. J.—One application would have been quite sufficient.

EMER.—William III. was a Dutchman; his wife was English.

DENIR.—Mausoleum's tomb is now in the British Museum.

WHARY OWL.—Apply to a police magistrate for advice and help.

CERTAIN.—A certain degree of stiffness is inevitable after long rides.

TROUBLED.—We can only advise you to obtain legal assistance at once.

DOUBTFUL.—You have been wrongly informed; there is no such regulation.

DELICATE.—The distress you complain of is probably caused by want of exercise.

ALIX.—Distances in Russia are measured by the verst, about two-thirds of English mile.

ANTHONY.—Blackstone, the celebrated English Judge, was born in 1723, and died in 1780.

A. CONSTANT READER.—You are liable to prosecution for not carrying out the agreement.

HENRY.—As it is out of print you had better go the rounds of the second-hand book-stalls.

INJURED.—He is bound to either take her back or provide her with separate maintenance.

S. A.—If the injury is healed, what is wanted is compensation to free the stiffened muscles.

CONSTANT READER.—Write to secretary, Chelsea Hospital, for information regarding pensions.

PROOF.—White wine vinegar is recommended to remove whitewash stains from carpets, cloths, &c.

DISTRESSED.—Wear shoes instead of boots, abjure woollen socks, and be sure there is free ventilation.

EMILIA B.—Only a dentist personally examining the tooth can say whether it is likely to be saved by stopping.

SCOTTICAL.—Early rising is assuredly good for the health, provided it be accompanied by early retirement too.

AGGIE.—Cut a piece from the top of an old kid shoe and insert it inside the ironholder you are going to make.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—The expense cannot be estimated; it is always costly work to get money out of Chancery.

W. E. R.—Rats may be got rid of by stuffing their runways with dry hay that has been well seasoned with cayenne pepper.

PRUDENCE.—Reading matter, flowers and music are among the few things which custom permits a man to give to a woman.

RYE.—A sailing ship takes fully three months to go to Valparaiso; a letter will reach that city from this country in six weeks.

ECONOMICAL.—To prepare a proper bath for one article would be a great deal more costly than to get it done by the professional dyer.

WORRIED HOUSEWIFE.—They are extremely difficult to get rid of when once firmly established. Make war upon them incessantly.

IGNORANT.—"Musik-capelle" literally means music chapel. "Capelle" is the German for orchestra, particularly that of a church.

OLD READER.—Loss is known of that region than of the Arctic, but one thing is certain, it is rigidly forbidden all the year round.

PHILIP.—Lord Raglan acted as aide-de-camp to the Duke of Wellington at the battle of Waterloo, and lost his arm in the engagement.

JOLLY JACK.—The dance designated "hornpipe" derives its name from a rustic musical instrument known and thus called in Wales.

LAURA.—A moderate solution of powdered borax and water is excellent for weak eyes. Bathe them in a fresh solution night and morning.

SUBURBAN.—Watering the walks with brine, or water containing some carbolic acid, will kill down all weeds and other plant life upon the walks.

LOVER OF PINE.—Fet squirrels are not uncommon. They live for many years in cages, and may be so tamed as to go about the house and grounds.

RHOBA.—Half boil it, rub it over with butter, set it before the fire, bake it until the shell becomes dark brown, then serve it with rich drawn butter.

GERNARD.—Give your gold fish occasionally a little grated raw butcher meat or raw fish, and change the water daily; small worms may be substituted for the grated meat.

ROBERT BRUCE.—The exact colour of the Scottish thistle are, of course, green in the stalk and fronds and purple in the flower; but the various thistles differ in their shades of green.

B. P.—The goodness of lobsters is determined by their weight, the heaviest being always the best. That of crabs is also known by their weight. In fresh oysters the shell is finally closed.

ADMIRER OF THE "LONDON READER."—We know of no method of filling up the scratches; we should advise your showing them to an expert. It is not possible to be certain what "very dirty" means in such a case.

RUTHIE.—To soften and whiten the skin, when free from pimples, apply a little glycerine diluted with fresh lemon juice. If the glycerine prove too severe for the face use rose water instead.

L. F.—Moisten a small piece of paper or linen with turpentine, and put it into the wardrobe, or bureau drawers, for a single day, three or four times a year. It is a simple recipe, and worth trying.

MAR.—Take one pint of cream, the whites of four eggs, a spoonful of rose-water, two spoonfuls of lemon juice, and wine and loaf-sugar to your taste. Whip the whole to a froth, and serve it in glasses.

S. D.—Potash will serve the purpose, or a little lime water; the whole intention is to prevent the milk from forming a curd upon entering the stomach (as it does when taken cold by itself), and to enable the digesting juices to get at it the more readily.

LOVE, THE MAGICIAN.

MAGICIANS of old
Wrought marvels we're told—
Turned reeds into sceptres, and dross into gold;
Wore robes of sand,
All seen to withstand;
Raised tempests and hushed them by waving a hand;
Nature's plan must obey
Their magical way—
But Love's an enchanter more mighty than they!

Love laughs at them all,
The great and the small,
The wise and the simple, Love laughs at them all!

For Love can control
And tame the wild soul
To follow him true as the needle the pole.
If his wand he but wave,
The coward grows brave,
And the slave is a freeman; the freeman a slave!
The proud he lays low,
And the victor must bow;
Love turns foe into friend, and dear friend into foe!

Love laughs at them all,
The great and the small,
The wise and the simple, Love laughs at them all!

The poor man hath store
If Love enters his door;
Rich and poor are Love's clients alike, evermore;
Even time lags behind,
Or flies like the wind,
Just as Love the Magician is cruel or kind.
Thus all things obey
Love's magical way,
And Love the Magician transforms them straightway.

Love laughs at them all,
The great and the small,
The wise and the simple, Love laughs at them all!

M. M.

STILL.—The best thing to take out tea stains is ammonia diluted with water; sponge carefully, and hold afterwards a hot iron on the wrong side, holding the dress between the hands not to mark it on the table.

REGULAR READER.—Judson's dye to suit the colour you wish will do very well. You must have shallow vessels to lay the skins hair sides down in. The vessel must be of full size for each skin, and the liquor must not be allowed to wet the fleshy part of the skin.

DISILLUSIONED.—If he is the kind of a man you have come to the conclusion to believe he is you are to be congratulated upon having got rid of a base adventurer. Young girls cannot be too cautious how they encourage correspondence with young men of whom they know little or nothing.

ROBERT.—The world is full of theories, but do not be disturbed by them any more than by the various speculations of modern times. So long as you have common-sense to guide you, you will not deviate from the proper paths which have been set before you to follow to life's end.

MAYFLOWER.—We should be glad to help you if it were possible; but even if we devoted a whole column to answering your questions we do not think it would avail you anything. You apparently want proper medical advice. For one thing, avoid farinaceous foods and take plenty of exercise.

AN OUTSIDER.—The name of ladies who have never been presented at the Queen's Drawing Room must be sent to the Lord Chamberlain's office a certain number of days previous to the ceremony, with that of the person undertaking to introduce them to the royal presence.

S. G.—Get the wood thoroughly smooth, give it a coat of clear French polish, lay the picture upon it, face to the wood, and rub it flat with a sponge dipped in methylated spirits; allow to dry, then dipping the finger in a little water rub slowly until all the paper disappears and the picture remains; apply another coat of polish and the job is done.

MATTIE.—A combination of oranges and coconuts is called "ambrosia." Here is the recipe: Procure a dozen fine oranges and one coconut. Peel the oranges carefully and slice them in rounds. Place a layer of orange in the bottom of a dish, sprinkle it well with sugar, add a layer of grated coconut, and so on until the dish is full. Heap the coconut on the top in the form of a pyramid.

E. N.—Get a pennyworth of permanganate of potash at a chemist's. Melt half of it in a small teaspoonful of water (hot or cold), and touch the spots with that until you have toned them down almost to the colour of the other parts, then give the whole back a coat of glaze, made by whisking white of egg into froth, then letting it subside, when a few drops of vinegar are added, and the varnish applied with a camel hair brush or feather.

ROSEMOND.—Put a layer of salt in a tub and a little sugar among it; put in the pork, skin side down; put sugar and salt on top, and rub in; rub and turn frequently for three weeks or a longer time; dry salt is by many considered better than placing the pork in brine; the ham is taken out and hung in a place over a smouldering wood fire. Old-fashioned people who use peats used to hang the ham in the wide chimney over the peat fire for one or two days.

E. L.—Smoked bacon is better to be soaked and scraped. It may be soaked a few hours. Put it on in cold water and let it boil, then simmer gently—eight pounds or ten pounds is the better of three hours gentle cooking—then take off the skin before it gets cold. Bacon that is not smoked should be put in hot but not boiling water, and when it boils let it simmer gently. A piece above four pounds weight should have twenty minutes to each pound, and twenty minutes over. Pork requires to be well cooked.

T. G.—Wet the silk, then with a sponge dipped in a solution of ether and chloroform rub over the stain; if the stain appears to have gone white clay is strewn over it, blotting-paper over that, and the stain is absorbed into the clay by using a hot smoothing iron over the blotting-paper. This will not always answer, and when it fails the yellow of egg mixed with chloroform is tried in the same way. The prevention of "injury to the material" will depend upon the judgment and skill displayed by the operator.

JEANIE DRAKE.—A century and a half ago in Scotland at marriage of persons belonging to the middle and upper ranks favours consisting of portions of ribbon and lace were attached to the bride's dress. After the ceremony all endeavoured to seize these as a matter of good luck. When the confusion had ceased the best man was expected to pull off the bride's garter; this she modestly dropped; composed of white and silver ribbon, the garter was separated into portions, which were divided among the company.

FLORA.—Such fabrics are often cleaned most successfully by using a pad of stale bread-crumbs out of the middle of the loaf so as not to have any hard edges in contact with the cloth. A little finely powdered chalk might be occasionally sprinkled on the pad, especially before rubbing the more soiled portions. When these have been dealt with take a clean bread-crumbs pad and rub over the entire garment with or without the powdered chalk, as your judgment may suggest. Before cleaning you should shake and brush well to remove dust, and do the same after cleaning to remove crumb and powdered chalk, always using a perfectly clean brush.

W. G.—Most ferns have a creeping root stock, or rhizome, as it is technically called. Roots go down from the apex, as the new fronds push up, and eventually the under part of the rhizome dies. Ferns of this class may live for ever, in a certain sense, though really no part alive to-day may have been living ten years ago. But some ferns have been ambitious, and instead of grovelling underground, have learned, as the evolutionists might say, to straighten the rhizome and lift it into the air. Then we have the tree fern, or one with an erect crown at any rate. It is not possible for ferns of this class to live for ever. They must eventually die of old age.

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